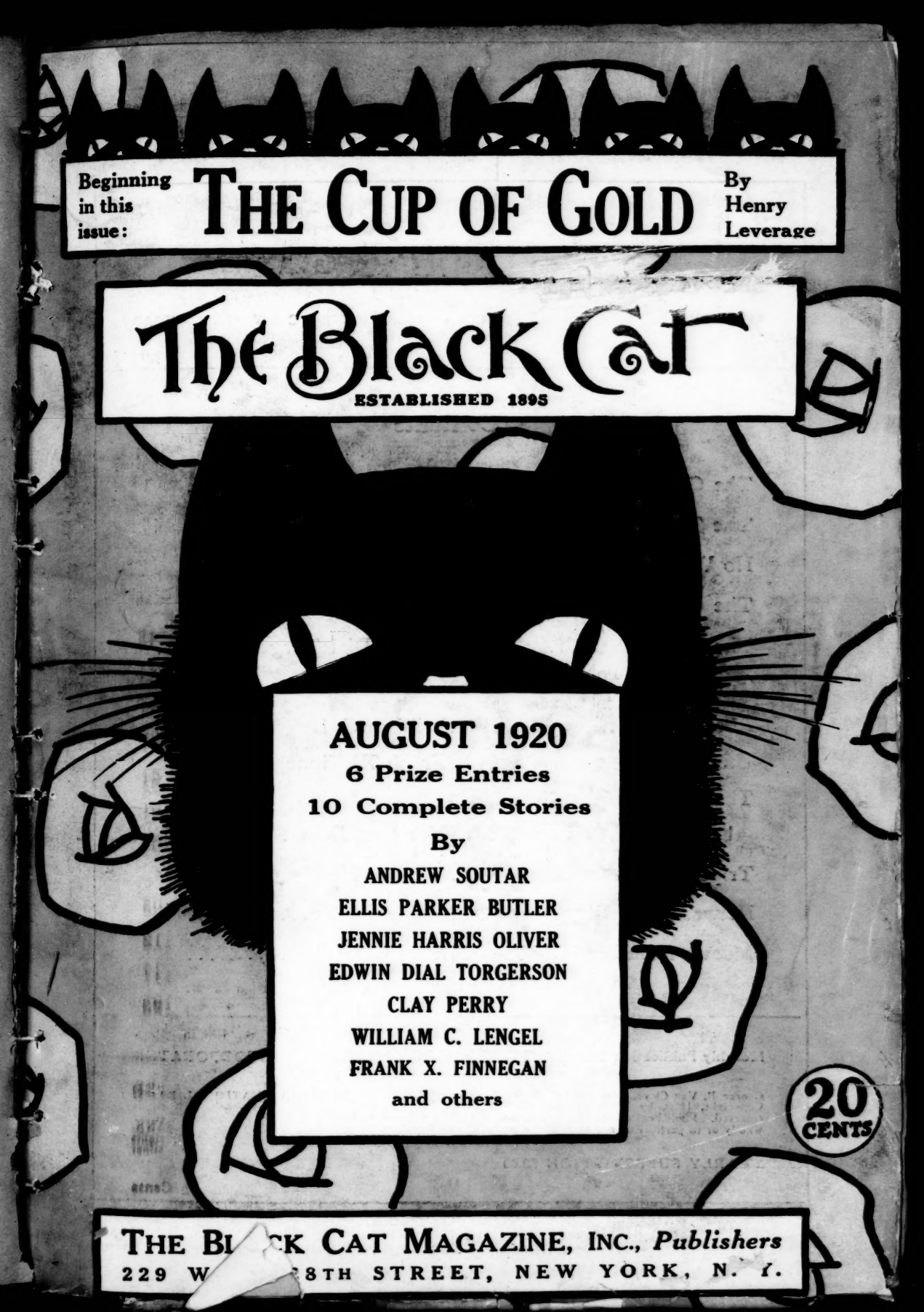
Beginning in this issue: **THE CUP OF GOLD** By Henry Leverage

The Black Cat

ESTABLISHED 1895



AUGUST 1920

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The Black Cat

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THE CUP OF GOLD

By HENRY LEVERAGE

Author of "Whispering Wires," "The White Cipher," "The Shepherd of the Sea"

A THREE-PART STORY

PART I

CHAPTER I

THE BRASS CHECK

AKE?"

"Right 'ere, sir."

"Have you got the check of my trunk?"

"I 'ave hit in my 'and, sir."

"Put it on the jewel trunk, quick."

Rake, otherwise known as Nollie Matches, worked swiftly in the half light which illuminated the station platform at Orangelands. He unbuckled a brass check, replaced it with another, glided alongside the baggage truck and finished the substitution by strapping the purloined check to the handle of an ordinary steamer trunk.

"All right," he whispered to a young man who was leaning on a cane and dragging at a straw-tipped cigarette. "All right, Chester."

"Good work! Suppose you stroll up to the end of the platform and get my golf bag. I left it near the express office."

Chester Fay watched the disappearing form of Rake. He hooked his cane on his left arm, tossed away the cigarette, turned and glided toward the opposite end of the station. Footsteps crunched the gravel. Fay drew back. He sensed danger from an unexpected quarter.

A tall girl climbed to the platform. She started toward the baggage truck, moving with athletic strides.

She was the niece of Holgate—the multimillionaire owner of the jewel trunk.

Fay watched her. He saw that she was examining the trunks. He heard Rake coming through the gloom. The pseudo-valet laid the golf bag on the planks. He touched his cap to the girl. She inquired:

"Can you tell me how late the limited for New York is?"

"Hit's fifty minutes late, Miss."

The girl's eyes wandered to the trunks. She drew away from them, rounded the truck and stepped to the edge of the platform. She glanced up and down the tracks. Her eyes widened beneath the brim of a flopping hat.

A whine sounded in the ribbons of steel. A whistle shrilled. An electric headlight, flickering and pencil-shaped, lifted over a fringe of green, steadied and bathed the station platform in dazzling white.

The girl started. She stepped away from the rails and glanced toward the outlines of the principal hotel of Orangelands. Forms moved through the shadows. An overburdened porter staggered in view with three pigskin bags. He was followed by two serious-faced men and a sinister-appearing old man.

"That's 'Olgate," whispered Rake to Fay.

Fay shifted his cane.

"A rum-looking cove," added Rake.

"Be careful," said Fay.

"'E ought to be robbed."

"Quite so, but look out. The girl might hear you."

Chester Fay and Nollie Matches watched the girl. Her actions were strange. She hurried over the platform, thrust out her arms and attempted to

ward the old man from the pile of eastbound luggage.

"Go back, Uncle!" she cried.

The old man flourished a stout cane.

"Don't go near that trunk, Uncle!"

Fay grasped Rake's arm.

"Get our suitcases," he whispered. "Go down to the end of the platform. There's something wrong, somewhere. We may be pinched. Get ready for a get-away."

A gust of wind marked the plunging passage of a giant Pacific-type locomotive. A vestibuled line of express, baggage and Pullman cars came to a grinding stop.

The old man raised his cane, brushed the girl aside, and struck the end of the jewel trunk smartly.

"Be careful when you load this one," he said to a baggage man. "Don't smash it!"

Fay glided in the direction taken by Rake. He turned and saw the girl, her uncle and the other two men hurrying toward a private car at the end of the train. A porter waited with a stool. The girl was the last to climb the steps. She reappeared almost instantly at a window. Her eyes blazed beneath the red light of an overhead semiphore lamp.

Suddenly she was drawn back by reaching hands.

"All aboard!" called a conductor emerging from the telegraph office.

A lantern swung across the platform. Air hissed. The brakes were released. The couplings between the cars were taken up with a forward jerk.

"Hurry up, Rake!" said Fay. "Watch your step. That's it!"

A door slammed behind them. They entered the Pullman.

A porter indicated a stateroom. Fay removed his cap, hung his cane on a rack and passed his hands through his prematurely gray hair.

"I say, Rake, I wouldn't be surprised if we made a very hot touch to-night."

"A 'ot touch?"

"A very warm one."

"'Ow's that, sir?"

"We're going to get Mr. Roderick Holgate's jewel trunk in Chicago. He is going to get our steamer trunk in New York. You switched the brass checks very nicely."

"It wasn't the first time you've worked that trick?"

"No! Perhaps it was too easy. Did you notice how oddly the girl acted?"

"I did, sir."

"I wonder what is really in that trunk?"

"Jewels, sir. The family jewels!"

"Let's hope it isn't something else."

CHAPTER II

A MAN IN A TRUNK

MASTER and man sat in the stateroom of the limited and waited for the conductor to verify the tickets and the porter to fetch such soft drinks as his ice box contained.

Having attended to these preliminaries, Fay rose and closed the door which shut out all view of the car's interior.

"Now, Rake," he said, "we are in somewhat of a tight place. There may be trouble before we reach Chicago. The old man may visit the baggage car and examine his trunk. In that event he will detect the substituted check."

"Hardly likely, sir."

"Drop the 'sir' and pay attention."

Rake, better known to the police of a score of cities as Nollie Matches, took off his cap, rubbed his bald head, moved his keen, white ferret face close to the window and squinted out at the fast-flying California landscape. He turned and stared at Fay.

The cracksman tapped a cigarette on the back of his hand. He lighted it and blew a puff of smoke toward the frosted globe which illuminated the stateroom.

"There is a chance for trouble," he repeated. "We must watch that chance.

What did you deduct from the girl's actions?"

"Oh, she's a ripper all right! A high-steppin' queen! The under-valet told me in Orangelands that she's the sole 'eiress to a hundred million quid!"

"Dollars?"

"No. Quids! Pounds!"

"That's an exaggeration. Roderick Holgate is rated at fifty or sixty million. He isn't worth any more than that. He is one of the minor millionaires."

"Minor?"

"Yes—as money goes in this country. He is a great yachtsman, plays bad golf, has a town house on Park Avenue, New York, and a big estate in Westchester County. His yacht, the Glorianna, is the probable defender of the America's Cup, this year."

"Is that what called him east so sudden?"

"I don't know. The point is, Rake, he had his luggage packed up very quickly. Now, are the jewels in the big trunk? What did you learn from the servants?"

"Blym little! They were a close-mouthed bunch. The under-valet said that 'Olgate was expecting a man from the east. The man came and then went away. He was from Boston."

"He couldn't have taken the jewels with him?"

"I don't think so. I'd say they were in the trunk—that we switched the checks on."

Chester Fay inhaled deeply of his cigarette, and reflected a moment. A long life of crime had not changed his appearance. As he sat there thinking he resembled a clean-cut athlete.

"Rake," he mused, "there's nothing in the game we have been playing for the last three years—nothing in it but disappointment and danger. I've a hunch that the police are about to round us up and send us away. We'll take this one chance on the jewel trunk and quit the game. The girl wore fine gems at the hotel. I hope they're in the trunk."

"She didn't carry a hand bag."

"Heiresses are careless, at times."

Rake polished his bald head. He replaced a loud checked traveling cap.

"I don't quite get this trunk game," he said. "I went it blind and did what you told me. How are we going to get the old boy's trunk?"

"Very easy. The claim-check you hold calls for his trunk. The claim-check he holds, or his valet, calls for my trunk."

Rake furrowed his brow.

"You see," added Fay, "that by changing the two checks on the trunks—he will get my trunk and I will get his. His trunk, instead of going through to New York—his destination—will be put off at Chicago. My trunk will go on through to New York—where he is welcome to it."

"Perfectly clear, sir."

"Suppose you put our grips on the rack, secure the golf bag so it can't fall down, and go through the train. Try and see if the vestibule door of the private car is locked. Look the passengers over. Pay particular note to any one who might be a detective. Then go as far toward the engine as you can. Get acquainted with the express men or the baggage men. Get off at stations and keep an eye on the whole train. Watch telegrams which the conductor might receive."

"Do you expect any trouble now?"

"None, until morning, but it's just as well to be careful. That girl may come through the train."

"Her name is Elaine."

"I know it."

"I wish I wasn't playin' the part of a valet," said Rake ruefully as he hung up his cap and opened the stateroom door.

Fay leaned against a cushion. Rake disappeared after a sharp glance up and down the corridor.

The cracksman reviewed the events of the night without finding an answer to the girl's wild actions or to the million-

aire's irascibility in dragging her from the window of the private car.

Little, or nothing could be learned until daylight. The limited was hurtling eastward at the swinging rate of sixty miles an hour. Soon it would be in the Rockies. Chicago was many dangerous hours away.

Fay took stock of his few possessions. He had a blued-steel automatic in his hip pocket. He carried a billfold that contained less than three hundred dollars. Rake was probably broke. The one chance to retrieve their fortunes was bound up in Holgate's jewel trunk. It was a last fling of desperate gamesters. The police of the seven cities were more than hostile. They had a full and complete record of the cracksman's life. They had more than one set of his finger-prints. Rake's ferret-keen face and general air of craftiness was photographed in a score of rogues' galleries.

The acting-valet finally glided into the stateroom, softly closed the door and braced his hands against a wash stand.

"Everything's quiet," he said. "Vestibule locked on the private car. Berths all made up in the Pullmans. Three drummers playing poker in the buffet-smoker. The head brakeman is watchin' them. He says our next stop is about midnight—when we change engines."

"See anything of the girl?"

"Nothing. Lights all out in the private car."

"Call the porter and we'll go to bed. I want a clear head in the morning, Rake."

Fay stood in the corridor as the porter made up the berths.

"George," he asked, "what car is that behind?"

"That's the Primrose, sah. Mr. Holgate's car."

"Where is he going?"

"New York. He's the big yachtsman, sah. There's going to be a yacht race when he gets thar. I heard the porters talkin' about it in the dining car, coming up from San Diego. You see his car was at Coronado Beach."

"Who had it down there?"

"His secretary, sah. That secretary lives just like a millionaire."

"Then the secretary and Mr. Holgate and the niece are the only ones in the car?"

"Yes, sah, excepting the other secretaries and sham-vallies that got aboard at Orangelands."

Fay glanced at Rake.

"Give the man a dollar," he said. "I was always interested in American millionaires. They're peculiar people."

Fay partly undressed after the porter had closed the door. He watched Rake climb into the upper bunk of the stateroom. He turned off the light and lay down on a couch. His foot reached and snapped a bolt of the door lock. His hand rested conveniently near the blued-steel automatic.

Dawn, purple and Western-glorious, found him wide awake. He shaved, washed and sent the sleepy Rake out to make a report. He waited and watched the rolling scenery of the mountains. The limited, on time to a minute, was mounting the backbone of the continent. Two Pacific-type locomotives chugged and snaked the long train over the Great Divide.

The morning passed. Noon, and a lonely luncheon in the dining car, brought no new development. It was at dinner time, with the waiter's first call ringing through the swaying train, when Rake hurried into the stateroom and slammed the door.

"She just went by!" he blurted to Fay. "The dame tried to get through the vestibule and into the baggage car. Then she came back. She's a wild one."

"Explain yourself!"

"This Elaine has her mind made up to see something in the baggage car. It's ahead of the express cars. They wouldn't let her through. She acted wild. Then she saw me—"

"Yes?"

"She pipes me off and goes chalk white. That pretty face of hers is the color of blood one minute and the color of a corpse the next. She must have thought I was following her."

"She recognized you as being the servile individual who was standing near the baggage-truck at Orangelands. Perhaps she took you for a crook. Your make-up is none too good, Rake."

"A crook? I'll lay a ten pun note she thought I was a Bow Street runner—a detective."

"Oh, come, Rake!"

"God strike me pink, if she didn't act that way! She grabbed the brass rail of the vestibule, started to faint, changed her mind and ran through the train toward the rear end where she is now."

"What do you think she wanted in the baggage car?"

"The bloomin' trunk we've copped—by changing the brass checks. She wanted to see hif hit was there!"

"Naturally she would—if it contains all her jewels."

Rake polished his egg-shaped head with the palm of his right hand.

"Queer jewels," he said and then lapsed into silence.

Fay went through the train. He eyed each passenger. He reached the rear Pullman. Coupled to it was the private car Primrose. The aroma of cooking filled the vestibule. A chef, in white cap and with sleeves rolled up, came out for a breath of air. He stared at the cracksman.

A sudden long swerve of the train, as it rounded a two-degree curve, threw open the door of the private car out of which the chef had stepped. Fay saw, with the keen eyes of a professional, a group of three standing in a corridor.

One was Holgate, in skullcap, with his seam-crossed face twisted in rage. A second figure was a valet who had accompanied the aged millionaire from the Orangelands hotel. The third was the girl. She was struggling to break away from the two men. She cried shrilly; then she wheeled and gazed at Fay, and her expression changed from strife to fear. Her hands broke from the clutching fingers. She covered her face. Fay, although the distance was considerable and the train's roar deadened his hearing, heard her cry:

"It's the man! He is following us!"

The chef glared at Fay, stepped inside the vestibule, and slammed the door.

The cracksman went back to Rake.

"You're right," he said. "There's more to this thing than we suppose. We seem to be gathering threads of truth—worked out along natural development. I hope we find out why that girl is so wrought up. There's something coming to us in Chicago, Rake."

"There usually is, Chester."

The cracksman kept close watch during the remainder of the ride. He got off at each station. He tried to glimpse the baggage car's interior. It was billed through. He studied the private car. He saw that the shades were close-drawn on all of the windows. A valet and a secretary sat on the rear platform. Their arms were folded—like guards!

Rake was instructed to attend to the hand-luggage as the train reached the outskirts of Chicago. He received orders to wait at the taxi stand at the front of the station.

Fay took the baggage check from the cockney. He swung from the Pullman's platform before the train had stopped. He hurried through a throng of city detectives, tourists and friends of incoming passengers. His glide was a far stride from a lockstep.

A "bucker" with a black cab promised to get the trunk as soon as it was unloaded at the baggage room. Fay crossed the street. He pulled down his cap, and watched for developments. There were a score of chances for a slip-up. Holgate might look through the baggage car for the trunk. The girl was a potential

danger. There were the ever-present hounds of the law. Chicago was inundated by a crime wave of unusual proportions.

The "bucker" appeared staggering under the weight of the stolen trunk. He strapped it alongside his seat, then looked around and sought for his passenger.

Rake emerged from the great station, carrying the golf bag and two handbags. Fay saw the cockney's signal that no one had followed him.

"Great Southern Hotel!" said the cracksman slamming the cab door shut after gliding across the cobbles.

"Now, Rake," he added, "think fast and keep close to me. I'll register under the same name we used at the Hotel Orangelands. You see that the porter gets that trunk up to my room. Bring the golf bag. We may need some of the tools in the bag to obtain the jewels."

Ten minutes of fast driving brought the taxi before the entrance to the Great Southern Hotel. Fay sprang out. He crossed the lobby like a duke in his own palace. He registered:

"Mr. James Beaucannon and valet, London."

Rake inspected a second-floor suite as Fay removed his coat and glanced out a window.

The hotel porter appeared with the trunk on a rubber-wheeled baggage truck. Rake tipped the man generously. He closed and double-locked the doors.

"Work quick!" snapped Fay. "We'll rip this trunk open and leave with the jewels. There is nothing to be gained by staying at this hotel. We left a broad trail to it."

The cockney eyed the trunk with professional concern.

"An easy keister," he said, untying the golf bag and selecting a sectional jimmy, which he screwed together. "Look out, Chester. This is the way we used to hopen them in London. We turn 'em over and begin at the bottom. They're easier there."

Fay stood back and watched his assistant. He reached and switched on all the lights of the room. The cockney sweated and cursed in choice Billingsgate. He pried loose a sheet-steel corner.

"Try the can-opener," suggested Fay.

Rake dropped the sectional jimmy upon a rug and dived into the golf bag. He brought forth an instrument which had given the police considerable trouble. It was a cross between a crowbar and a huge shears. He strained and started ripping the bottom of the trunk.

"That's a rather strong trunk," commented Fay.

The cockney removed his hands from the can-opener. He eyed the blisters on his palms. He sniffed the air of the room.

"Gol blym!" he said. "Something's strong—smell it?"

"Go on!"

"I believe the blym jewels are packed in lime."

"Lime?"

"Yes—lime. I smell lime and things."

Fay pressed the sweating cockney aside and turned the trunk on end. He ripped it with the can-opener. He scissored the plates and bent a sheet of tempered steel. A bundle of clotted rags fell from the opening. A shower of lime poured to the rug.

"Blym queer jewels!" gasped Rake.

"Out of the way! Look out!"

The cracksman smashed the trunk wide open. He staggered and dropped the can-opener. He covered his eyes with one hand as he pointed with the other.

"What—what is that?" he asked.

Rake ceased sniffing. He fell on hands and knees and crawled to the wreck of the trunk. He reached and gingerly lifted the fold of a stained overcoat. A grinning, distorted, leering-mouthed corpse stared at him. The trunk contained a body with a dent in the skull.

"Good God!" said Fay. "Holgate or his pretty niece killed this man!"

CHAPTER III

MILLIONS IN GOLD

THEY left the body of the dead man in the room.

Fay attended to a few details before he turned the key in the lock and effectively plugged the keyhole.

He examined the man's clothing, fingers, shoes, and searched the lime and debris for clues to a possible identity. He went over his search a second time and used the acumen of a shrewd detective plus his experience in the underworld. He overlooked nothing.

His last act was a protective one. He seized a towel and wiped away all possible finger-prints. Rake waited in the hall.

"Watch yourself," the cracksman told the shaking cockney. "Brace up! Get some color in your face. We've got to go down the elevator and through the lobby. Don't drop anything."

"God!" said Rake through chattering teeth. "Good God!"

"Yes. We made a very hot touch. Think of expecting a quart or two of diamonds and getting a shock like that."

"The police are going to swing us for the job—if they catch us."

"Our reputations are none too good, Rake. We can hardly explain matters satisfactorily to a jury."

The valet stepped into the elevator after Fay. They were dropped to the main floor of the hotel. The cracksman strode across the lobby and raised his finger for a cab. Rake, staggering under the load of the two grips and the golf bag, almost collided with a stout policeman who had been talking with the cab starter. The cockney edged away from the officer and stumbled into the cab.

"Englewood!" shouted Fay. "Quick, driver!"

The cracksman gazed out through the windows at the brilliantly lighted streets of Chicago. He gripped Rake's arm as the cab lurched and swayed.

"Brace up!" said he. "Don't cave!"

"I'm all right now. Where are we going?"

Fay darted a swift glance at a street corner. He opened the cab door and shouted to the driver:

"What way are you heading?"

"To Englewood, sir."

"I said Oakwood. Turn around. Are you drunk?"

The chauffeur cursed, stopped the fast-flying cab, and backed in a narrow street.

"Oakwood," repeated Fay before he closed the door.

The lights of the streets grew scattered and yellow. Mean suburbs were passed. Fay watched each movement of the driver. He reviewed the course of events from the moment he had ordered Rake to change the brass checks on the trunks.

The baying hounds of the law would take up the chase by morning. They would run down the clues. The trail led back to Orangelands and the great hotel there. It would be an easy matter to wire the California city and find out that a young man and his valet were stopping at the hotel. The young man, or his valet, had checked a trunk to Chicago. The trunk had been taken to the Great Southern Hotel. A body had been moved in the trunk.

"It's all clear!" Fay blurted savagely. "We've got to make our connections and get to New York. It's the safest city to hide in. I wouldn't wonder if we didn't have to leave the country. The police will never believe we didn't commit that murder. Holgate is too big a man to suspect."

"We can peach on him and save ourselves," suggested Rake.

"Suppose the girl killed that man?"

"We'll turn her up to the police. I don't want to 'ang for something I didn't do."

"If we confess and tell the police our part in the affair, we'll do time anyway.

There's that Portland job, Rake. There's that Butte, Montana, affair. Besides, they could send us away for changing the baggage checks."

"Blym if they can't!"

Fay alertly took charge of the situation. He guided the taxi driver to a lonely section of Oakwood. He paid the man and watched the red light of the cab disappear over a hill.

"Now, Rake," he said, lifting one of the grips, "there's a street-car line over there. We'll catch a car and ride as far as we can to-night. We'll separate. We'll double and twist. We'll throw away the golf bag. It's too bright a mark to carry."

"I 'ates to part with those good tools."

"So do I, but they must go. Throw them under that culvert, push them way in. They won't be found for weeks. Now, for the street-car line."

Fay signaled the first car by springing out and waving his hands across the track. He obtained valuable information from a sleepy conductor and the scattered passengers. He found it possible to work east and north by means of interurban lines. Rake took the cracksman's orders. They slept under hedges and in barns. They reached Cleveland on the second day after leaving Chicago. A slow run on a little-used line took them to Philadelphia. From that city they journeyed to New York by trolley and the Hudson Tubes.

"We're here," said Fay, staring at the Woolworth Tower. "Call a cab, Rake, and we'll go to Dan the Dude's—a safe place to hide."

The partners' approach to the Stag Hotel, run by Dan the Dude, was a cautious one.

Fay went ahead, after dismissing a taxi driver. He dodged down a side street, wheeled suddenly and peered intently into the faces of every man who passed him. None of them seemed to have the appearance of a sleuth.

Entering the tiny office of the Stag Hotel, Fay asked for the proprietor.

"He's gone out yachting," said a sallow-faced clerk. "Anything I can do?"

"Two rooms with connecting bath. See that there are towels and ice water. My valet with the luggage will be along presently."

Rake arrived. The clerk raised his brows knowingly. He watched the elevator disappear.

"Two heavy men from the west," he deducted. "Dan the Dude's friends are safe here."

Fay spread his linen and clothing over a narrow bed. He went into Rake's room and watched the cockney shaving with an ancient English razor.

"We're located," he said sitting down on a couch. "We won't venture out of these rooms until we hear from Dan. The police may be right after us."

Rake poised his razor and glanced apprehensively toward a door. His hand shook. "I must be gettin' a bit old," he said. "I've 'ad a 'ard trip."

"There's harder ahead!"

"Why?"

"We've got to get out of this country. You're known by half the stool-pigeons and Dicks in this town. I'm not quite so notorious, but they're after me, Rake."

"Dicks" in the argot of the underworld meant detectives. Rake understood most of the American slang. He lacked the Continental and world-wide experience of Fay, however.

"The bobbies of this country are very rough," he commented, going on with his shaving. "I've a mind to try a cattle boat back 'ome."

"The situation could not be worse."

"You're blym right! We're wanted for a murder we didn't do."

"Who killed that old man?"

" 'Olgate or his niece did."

"It looks that way, Rake, but which one?"

"I'd lay it to the—"

Fay lighted a cigarette.

"Go on," he said. "Who do you think murdered him?"

"The old cove!"

"Probably. But what does the girl—Elaine—know about it?"

"She saw the job done. She saw her uncle sap the old geezer on the head. 'E must of 'it 'im a 'orrible blow. 'E caved in his skull."

"Odd," mused Fay, with his eyes half closed. "Very odd that a man of Holgate's position in life should stoop to murder. Why did he murder that man? Who was the man? What does the girl know? Why did she act so strangely on the train?"

"You ask questions like a Bow Street runner, Chester."

Fay ran his fingers through his prematurely gray hair.

"If we can guess the answer to those questions," he said, "we can get more out of the affair than gems and pearls. We can—"

Rake lowered his razor and darted a swift glance at the door.

"Thought I heard somebody out there," he whispered. "I must 'ave the shakes."

Fay rose, crossed the room, turned the latch and threw open the door. The hallway was deserted.

"All clear," he said, when he strode to the couch. "Brace up, Rake! We're not caught yet. We're in the hotel of Dan the Dude—where no man was ever arrested. The place has that record. Dan stands very well with the powers that rule."

The cockney finished shaving. He rubbed the blue surface of his chin. He combed the few locks of hair that straggled from his bald head—like straw around an egg.

"You was saying we can get something out of the murder," he suggested. "What can we get—but the electric chair? I hate them things. I rather be 'anged!"

"We have a few cards in our hands, Rake. We know that a millionaire—fifty times over—either committed a murder or tried to hush one up. He placed the corpse, or caused it to be placed, in a steel-lined jewel trunk. His niece probably aided and abetted him. Can't you see where we come in?"

"I can see where we get 'anged. D'y' think the bobbies are going to believe that 'Olgate killed that man? They're going to say we did it. Didn't we 'ave a suite of rooms at the Orangelands Hotel? Didn't we check a trunk to Chicago? Didn't the trunk we switched contain a body? Who would kill the man but us? We're crooks!"

Fay squared his thin shoulders. His hand clapped back to his hip pocket with the swiftness of a striking tiger. He sprang to his feet and pulled out his automatic. It was leveled at his right hip and covered the door.

"Open that!" he said tensely. "There's somebody there."

Rake glanced at the cracksman.

"Open it," Fay repeated.

"It may be the bobbies."

"Open it!"

The door swung open. Dan the Dude, a hooked-nosed, old-time fence and safe-blower, with a cunning catfish mouth and huge ears, stepped in, blinked at Fay's level revolver, then raised his eyes to the cracksman's face.

"Hello, Chester," he said. "I see you've got your calling card right in your hand. How are you, old pal?"

"Bad, Dan. We made a hot touch in Chi. I guess the bulls are after us. Hear anything?" Fay pocketed the gun.

"Not a word—about you. Nothing in the papers."

"I know that. I've been watching them. The police are keeping quiet. Rake and I switched checks on a jewel trunk and—well, we didn't get what we expected."

The Dude stared at Rake. He flashed a hand across his mouth. It was heavy with blue-white diamonds.

"It's all in the game, Chester," he said. "You didn't use to make many mistakes in the old days. You and Charlie Laurie

and Danny Nugent and old John Yegg came in right often with nice sparklers. Those days were all right, but I've got something better than gems lined up for you two."

The ex-crook moved to the door. He slyly closed it. He turned, stared at the connecting hallway between the rooms.

"Any one in there, Chester?"

"No."

"Door locked?"

"Yes."

"Come close, both of you. Stand near me. I can't be too careful in this."

Rake glided to the side of the Dude. Fay thrust his hands in his pockets.

"You're in luck," said Dan. "You came at the right moment. I've been yachting—up City Island way, with a man you both know."

"Who?" asked Fay. "I never knew anybody who owned a yacht."

"Well, he owns one now. Remember Big Scar?"

"'Arry Raymond?"

The Dude turned to the cockney. He closed one eye.

"Yes, Harry," he whispered. "And Harry is after the richest game in the world. He tells me that he knows where there are millions ready to be picked up. He chartered a yacht out of the proceeds of a big job in Vancouver. He's got Red Leary and Mike the Bike and little Jimmy Hope with him. He wants one or two more men—to help him get several tons of gold."

"That's too much bloomin' money!" exclaimed Rake.

"How about you, Chester?" asked the Dude.

"The bigger the game, the better I like it, Dan. It can't be too big—but where is this gold? What does Big Scar want a yacht for?"

"I don't know where the gold is myself. It's up City Island way. I do know who the gold belongs to. Big Scar told me in private."

"Is it in a bank?"

The Dude grasped Fay's sleeve. He breathed into the cracksman's ear:

"It ain't in a jug. It was taken from the Subtreasury on Wall Street to a shipyard at City Island. It's either aboard the steam yacht Standart, or the racing sloop Glorianna."

"The Glorianna?"

"Sure! Holgate's sailing yacht."

Fay and Rake both sat down on the couch suddenly. They stared at each other. They eyed Dan the Dude.

"'Olgate!" repeated the cockney, like a man coming out of a dream. "That bloody murderer!"

"Do you know him?" asked their host.

Fay rose from the couch, paced back and forth across the room, turned, looked out the nearest window, clenched both fists and wheeled upon the wondering Dude.

"Dan," he said hotly, "I want a few details of what you know before—well, before I give you our answer about going with Big Scar and his mob. How do they know this gold is at City Island?"

"It was taken up there in four trucks. Big Scar followed it. He had a wire that it was going to be moved. It went in the shipyard. It wasn't there when Scar prowled the place that night. Only one yacht left the yard that day—the Glorianna. She was on the ways getting her keel scraped. The gold went with her. She met the Standart—Holgate's big steam yacht—in Pelham Bay. The gold may have been transferred to the Standart. It may still be aboard the Glorianna."

"Then Big Scar—Harry Raymond—chartered another yacht for a piracy job, Dan?"

"Yes—if you want to call it piracy!"

"When did Holgate get back from California?"

"Big Scar says the millionaire and his daughter came back about three days ago. They're aboard the Standart."

Fay's mind worked swiftly. He si-

lenced the open-mouthed and boiling cockney with a flashing glance. He realized that he was in possession of facts which might be used to tremendous advantage. The Dude's candor in the matter of Big Scar and the million swag —the body in the trunk—the coming races for the America's Cup—all were the warp and woof of a desperate enterprise which could be played for big stakes.

"Dan," he said, "I think you can count Cocky and me out of the job. You know the penalty for piracy?"

"I thought you couldn't play it high enough, Chester?"

"Millions are pretty big. But there's too many men in the thing now. You say there's Big Scar and Red Leary and Mike the Bike and Little Jimmy Hope. That's a crowd!"

"It's some mob. Every one is a sticker!"

"That may be, Dan. But the whole thing sounds like a desperate proposition. Let Cocky and I think it over. I'll come down stairs as soon as it gets dark, and let you know."

Dan the Dude departed. Fay closed the door. He grasped Rake by the arm.

"What's the use of splitting that money five or six ways," he said incisively. "You and I can get it!"

"Millions?"

"Why, sure, Rake! It's easier to steal millions than ten dollars. We've both been hounded over this world by the police. We're liable to be arrested at any minute. We might as well be hanged for a big touch as a small one. Let's go aboard the Standart and see Holgate. He'll know us. He saw us on the Limited. He undoubtedly committed a murder in the presence of his niece. He will be forced to allow us to stay aboard his yacht. He will have to treat us like kings. Rake, I'd rather have a millionaire's secret than money in the bank. He'll give us what money we demand in order to keep us quiet."

"Are you going to tell him we're crooks—that we switched the trunks?"

"No. I'm going to tell him that we are detectives!"

CHAPTER IV

GENTLEMEN AND ROGUES

FAY'S announcement that he intended to play the rôle of a detective caused the cockney to be mildly cheerful.

Rake had the saving grace of humor in his make-up. He had acted as Fay's valet in shady enterprises. Somehow, or other, they had always come out right. The police were still behind them, although not far enough to admit of a feeling of safety.

The cracksman started pacing the room and talking at the same time. He moved with the lanky stride of a thoroughbred. His silver-gray hair was ruffled. His chin was thrust out. His eyes snapped as he jerked and short-cropped his words.

"Rake, we might as well be in this game of life for all we can get out of it. Think of the miserable grubbers in this town and in London. Think of the weak-willed drifters and the men who are afraid to take a chance when the opportunity comes to them."

"Think of the bloomin' crew in the jail."

"I've thought of them — too often. Consider this situation: A millionaire, or his lovely niece, pack a man in a trunk. We get the trunk, by knavery. We will be suspected of the murder. We learn, through Dan the Dude that this same millionaire has caused to be moved—millions in swag. It's probably on board his steam yacht."

"What did he put the gold there for, Chester?"

"He must have wired ahead and had it put on his yacht, so he could use it in case of a getaway. Remember, he committed a murder!"

"Maybe 'e'll sail away to foreign ports."

"Perhaps that's his intention. But, then, he has the yacht race to hold him here. His sloop, the Glorianna, is the probable contender for the America's Cup. It will beat the Boston yacht in the trial races."

"Rum go!" said the cockney. "'Ere's a man going to defend the America's Cup who is guilty of murder. Who knows it but you and me?"

"The niece—Elaine."

"That's all?"

"Yes. Don't you see the possibilities?"

"They're blym complicated. 'Ow about the police?"

"Ignore them. Look at the other side. Suppose you were a multimillionaire? Suppose a man came to you and you killed him with a blunt instrument? Suppose you packed him in a trunk, checked the trunk east in order to get rid of the body, and then found that, through a mistake, or the act of crooks, or otherwise, the trunk and the body and the murder was all laid to someone else? Then, Rake, suppose that someone else arrived and said:

"A million for my silence."

Rake rubbed his eyes. He sprang from the couch where he had been sitting. He grasped Fay's arm.

"Hit's our last chance!"

Fay disengaged the cockney's hand from his sleeve.

"Then," he added, after another turn about the room, "consider that we tell this millionaire that we are private detectives—who know everything."

"They always know everything."

Fay winked at the cockney.

"We're going to be rich, pal. We have all the trumps in our hands. There is only one danger that I can see."

"What?"

"The heavy mob who have chartered the yacht and who are going after the gold — Harry Raymond and Mike the Bike and Red Leary and Jimmy Hope."

"They'll spoil our game!"

"No. They'll probably blunder. We don't belong with that class of people. Rake, there isn't a gentleman among them."

"'Arry used to tell me 'e was the son of a duke."

"Harry Raymond is the son of a costermonger. He has nerve and enterprise, but he has served too many prison sentences to be exactly sure of himself. You know, Rake, jail weakens a man's nerve in time."

"Do you think they will try to steal the yacht?"

"They may and they may not. It's too big, though, for them. It's our kind of job. It's the touch we've always been waiting for."

Rake glanced at the door which led to the hallway.

"Think," said Fay, "what some men would do if they had our secret—the secret of the body in the trunk?"

"God 'elp 'Olgate!"

"We'll not be hard on him. But he must take care of us and get us out of this country on his yacht. Otherwise we're liable to swing for the murder. I don't doubt that five hundred detectives in fifteen different cities are looking for you and me."

"And we didn't do anything but swipe a trunk."

"Obtain one, Rake. Be careful of your slang."

The cockney eyed the door. "Suppose they'd come in there, now?"

Fay tapped his hip pocket. "They won't!" he said crisply. "Dan would give us warning. You better put on your coat and go down the back way. Try and buy some flannel trousers, caps and yachting shoes. You may find a store open. Here's fifty dollars. We're short, Rake."

The cockney took five bills from the cracksman's hand.

"What are the trousers and the shoes for?"

"We're going yachting, Rake. We'll charter a launch at City Island and find

the Standart—Holgate's yacht. We'll go up the landing stage and send a card to the millionaire. He will do the rest. I'm sure he will, Rake!"

Rake buttoned his coat and left the room. Fay paced back and forth. He ran his hand reflectively into his pocket and felt the thin fold of bills there. He had almost reached the end of his rope. Crime had not paid.

He thought of Dan the Dude. Dan, who had an eye out for future possibilities, was always willing to back a successful crook. He staked card mobs on the deep-sea boats. He bought questionable gems—at half their value. Stamps found their way into his safe. He had been known to dabble in oil paintings and stolen notes on the Bank of England.

Fay decided to stake everything on the chance that Holgate would cave when confronted by the facts in his possession. There was no other way to find out who the murdered man was. The tailor's tags had been ripped from the clothing. The police were silent on the mystery. Their silence was a dangerous thing. It indicated world-wide activity.

Rake came into the room with a large bundle under his arm.

"Got four pair of trousers, two yachting caps and spar-deck shoes," he said. "'Ere's the change."

The cockney held out some silver.

"Keep it, Rake. Pack up. Look the rooms over and see that nothing is left. Anything suspicious outside?"

"There's a parade or something. I 'ad a good look at the papers. Nothing about the murder in them. There was a bit of an article about the yacht race. It's coming off the day after to-morrow."

"Anything about the Standart or Holgate?"

"Nothing."

"Hurry, then. We'll leave here and go to City Island. I suppose the steam yacht is in the Sound."

Fay saw Dan the Dude for a brief minute. He told the ex-crook and fence that he was going to Bridgeport and then on to Boston. He paid him ten dollars for the suite of rooms.

"Need any money?" asked the Dude calculatingly.

"No. Tell Harry Raymond that'll I'll let him know, through you, about the matter you mentioned. Tell him, for me."

Fay climbed into a taxi which Rake chartered. The ride to City Island was a long one. The driver knew his route. He threaded Broadway, swung at 177th Street, crossed the town to the Grand Concourse and then took the polished asphalt of Fordham Road to the Sound, where he turned northward and switched on his head-lights.

Crossing the bridge to City Island, Fay leaned from the cab.

"Make for Peterson's Wharf," he ordered. "Let us down at the head of the wharf. Can we get a launch there?"

"Going aboard a yacht?"

"Yes."

"Which one?"

"Standart."

The chauffeur bent over the steering-wheel and stared at the lights which dotted the Sound. He pointed a greasy finger.

"There's a fleet at anchor over there, boss. There's going to be a race to-morrow. Guess the Standart is with them."

Fay climbed out of the taxi as it stopped at the head of the wharf. Rake sprang to the planks and set down two grips.

A bent and whiskered seaman approached the group as Fay paid the driver.

"Have you got a motor boat?" asked the cracksman.

The old salt glanced at the grips.

"The Nimbus is right here, sir. She's my boat and ready for service."

"I want to go to the Standart, right away. You know the Standart—Mr. Holgate's yacht?"

A squinting glance at the two men, a

swift appraisal of their clothes and luggage, was followed by a calculated pause.

"I know 'er," said the seaman finally. "She's 'way out. She's near the Glorianna. It'll be five dollars to put you aboard her."

"Take the bags! It's all right!" snapped Fay.

The sailor turned and strode toward a ladder which disappeared into the dark waters of the Sound. Rake glanced belligerently at the seaman, then lifted the grips and followed Fay across the rotting planks. They climbed into a small launch. The seaman cast off the painter, pressed against the piles, recovered his balance and started turning a single-cylinder engine. It sparked and began thrashing the propeller. The launch darted toward the lights of the yachting fleet.

"'E's a regular pirate," whispered Rake to Fay.

"Sisst!"

Fay moved forward. He leaned close to the seaman whose right hand grasped the upper spoke of a polished wheel.

"Can you tell me if Mr. Holgate or his niece are aboard the Standart?"

"Don' know, young man. Sometimes they are and sometimes they're not. I don't usually get passengers for that yacht. They send a boat ashore."

"I don't know Mr. Holgate," admitted Fay with engaging candor. "I was invited out, however."

The salt turned his head. He eyed the cracksman, then swung his eyes over the dark course.

"You don't know him, eh? He is no friend of yours?"

"None whatsoever. This is a business trip I am on."

"You'll do scant business with him. He's generally hated."

"Why?"

"Mean as they make 'em."

"In what way?"

"Underpays his crew. Squeezes every cent. Buys stores and supplies in New York instead of City Island. Some say he's money mad. Others say he's crazy."

"How about the Glorianna?"

The salt moved the wheel, steadied it and shifted a cud of tobacco.

"The Glorianna's the fastest sloop in these waters. She must o' cost old Holgate a pretty penny. Some say, he's doing it for advertising."

"Doing what?"

"Racing for the America's Cup. He hasn't paid out two or three hundred thousand for nothing. That ain't Holgate!"

"It's a patriotic thing to do. I understand Sir Roderick Brooke's yacht is very speedy."

The seaman rose and pointed toward the Long Island shore.

"The English yacht is over there," he said. "She is waiting to see which of the two contenders defends the cup. The Boston yacht has no chance with the Glorianna. I saw her in a try-out today. She don't stand up like the Glorianna. She can't beat to windward as fast. She's only got one good sailing point. That's 'fore the wind. It don't win races as a rule."

Fay moved aft and seated himself beside the cockney.

"It'll be an hour before we reach the Standart," he said. "That man forward says that Holgate is generally hated. He says that some of the City Islanders think the millionaire is insane."

"They're blym right! 'Ow did 'e make 'is money?"

"Stock manipulation."

"Do you think 'e's going to welcome us?"

"Yes and no. We'll force him to our way of thinking, Rake. We hold his secret. Remember what I said about a millionaire's secret? It's a very valuable asset."

Rake pulled his collar up around his neck. He shivered in the damp mist and stared along the launch's wake to where the faint lights of City Island shone.

"We're a bleedin' long ways out," he said through chattering teeth. "Suppose 'Olgate throws us overboard?"

"He won't, after I tell him we're private detectives sent to investigate a murder committed at Orangelands."

Rake turned and searched the scattered fleet for some sign of a welcome haven. He shook his head.

"It's late, Chester. It's blym near midnight."

"Easy with the Chester. I'm Charles Conroy and you are—simply Raker—my assistant. I think that's the Standart over there."

A two-thousand ton creation, that rode the waters of the Sound like a slender swan, loomed above the launch. Her rails were brass and teak-wood. Her single funnel glowed like a Manilla cigar. Her spars and cabins and outswung boats were varnished to the color of rare panels. A landing stage hung invitingly from her starboard waist. At the top of this stairway a sailor stood who eyed the launch suspiciously.

"Is Mr. Holgate aboard?" sang out Fay.

"Who are you? Sheer off!"

"I want to see Mr. Holgate or Miss Holgate!"

Figures moved on the yacht's bridge. A braided cap rose above the canvas windbreak. A second cap appeared.

"Sheer off!" shouted the voice of an officer.

"Draw alongside," whispered Fay to the seaman in the bow of the launch. "I'll be responsible."

"But—"

"I'm responsible. Put me aboard that yacht!"

The cracksman's voice was compelling. The sailor opened the switch, stopped his motor, starboarded the bow and glided under the towering sheer of the yacht. Fay grasped the rocking gunwales and braced his feet across the cockpit. He glanced up and into the eyes of a tall girl who had hurried out of a cabin.

Wonder gave way to fear in her downward stare. She steadied herself with an effort.

"What do you want with my uncle?" she cried.

"Five minutes' talk," said Fay, springing to the landing stage. "I'm sure he'll grant it to me."

"You're the man I saw on the train!"

"Certainly!"

"You can't come up!"

"I'm going to. This gentleman with me is my assistant operative. Tell your uncle that two detectives have arrived."

"Detectives?"

"Yes. May we come aboard, now?"

"Are you detectives?"

"Yes! We are!"

The girl swayed. She grasped the polished rail and glanced helplessly toward the bridge of the yacht. Her lips formed one word as she stared at Fay:

"Come."

CHAPTER V

THE SECRET PACT

FAY gave the boatman a five-dollar bill and climbed the landing stage of the Standart.

He was closely followed by Rake; who carried the two grips. The girl waited until both men had stepped to the deck of the yacht.

"Follow me," she said. "I'll take you to my uncle."

Fay touched her sleeve.

"A moment," he whispered. "Is Mr. Holgate dressed?"

"Yes. He is playing bridge with some gentlemen in the after saloon—Mr.—Mr.—?"

"My name is Conroy. My assistant operative is Raker. We represent a private agency—of Boston."

Fay wondered if the girl caught the slight hesitancy. Boston was a shrewd guess that the murdered man had come from that town.

"Boston?"

"Yes, Miss Holgate. You see we were retained—some time ago—to go to Orangelands with a certain gentleman—who is dead now."

The girl held her head erect. She reached out her hand and disengaged Fay's fingers from her sleeve.

"Don't touch me!" she exclaimed. "I never had any respect for private detectives."

Rake heartily concurred in this statement. He stared at Elaine Holgate with admiration.

"Some of them are a bad lot," Fay admitted. "But then," he added coldly, "they are necessary in this day and age."

Elaine moved her hand toward her hair. She swished her gown and started toward a cabin door, at each side of which shone two lighted portholes.

"Go in there," she directed. "Sit down and wait until I get my uncle. You may ring for anything you want."

She was gone along the starboard side of the deck. Fay slid open a door, glanced in, turned and motioned for Rake, who stood with the two bags in his hands.

The cockney perched upon a thickly cushioned divan and eyed the furnishings of the little cabin. He pulled up his trousers, crossed his legs, and leaned back, saying:

"Mind pushing that button, Chester. I'd like a pint o' 'alf and 'alf. Yellow Top said we could 'ave anything we wanted."

"Easy," whispered Fay. I'm Conroy—not Chester. The girl is not to be called Yellow Top. Her name is Miss Holgate—from now on. Be careful! This cabin might have a dictaphone in it."

Rake studied the furnishings and fittings of the cabin. It was small but complete. Two divans, wicker chairs, a round table, screwed to the deck, a gleaming row of port holes and a green rug attracted the cockney's attention. He finished his scrutiny before he replied to Fay.

"I like this place. I think we might as well 'ang for a pound as a pence. I saw the man in the boat go away."

"We burned our bridges! Keep mum. Let me do the talking when Holgate comes. Just look wise. Follow my lead."

"Suppose 'e finds out who we are?"

"He can't!"

"Why can't 'e?"

"Leave that to me. Leave—sist! Here comes somebody."

Steps passed the cabin door and went forward without pause.

"A sailor or deck officer," said Fay.

"Yellow Top is taking a blym long time."

"Yes. She probably is loyal to her uncle. They may be setting a trap."

Fay paced the cabin rug—athwart ship. He clasped his hands where the bulge of the blued-steel automatic showed under his well-fitting coat. He turned now and then and stared at Rake. He moved with his lanky strides as alert as a fencer.

The situation was not altogether to his liking. He reviewed it. Suspense was jangling his nerves. The girl had been gone for over fifteen minutes. No sound came from aft. The yacht rode at anchor with even keel.

Holgate might be doing any number of things. There was the wireless aboard by which he could summon the police. There was a crew of at least one hundred men, who were probably at his beck and call.

"I'll give her five minutes more, Rake," said the cracksman. "Then we'll go out on deck and look around."

"Maybe 'Olgate won't see us."

"He's got to see us! Consider what we know. We were at that hotel in Orangelands. We switched checks and got the trunk with the body in it. There's nothing to show that we didn't steal that trunk in order to find out what was in it."

"We found out—all right."

"What I mean!" snapped Fay. "What

I mean, Rake, is that Holgate hasn't anything on us. We've got everything on him—a murder—a covering up—a shifting of gold to this yacht or the Glorianna for purposes of flight. Now he can stay here and race that Boston sloop and defend the America's Cup—if he keeps quiet."

Rake removed his cap and polished his bald head with the flat of his hand. He started to replace the cap when the door slid open and Elaine appeared.

She strode into the cabin and leveled her glance at Fay.

"Uncle will be here in a minute."

"That's good."

"He says he's sorry to keep you waiting, Mr.—?"

"Conroy!"

"Mr. Conroy."

Rake fingered his cap. He stood erect and pretended to stare out through the thick green glass of a porthole. He saw nothing except the reflection of the dome lights of the cabin.

A tenseness was broken by the appearance of Holgate. The millionaire narrowed a crafty pair of eyes.

"Who are you two?" he asked brusquely. "Get off my yacht!"

"I'm Conroy!" said Fay. "Conroy, of the Conroy & Dudley Agency of Boston. This man with me is a trusted operative of vast experience. I'll not mince words. I'm perfectly willing to leave this yacht. In fact, I should leave this yacht, and report to my people."

"Report what?" whispered Holgate.

"You know! Do you think for one minute that I would come out here and force myself upon you if I hadn't facts enough to hang a certain rich man—very near me. Why, I was retained to protect the man you murdered!"

Holgate moistened dry lips. His knees shook. He turned a helpless glance toward his niece.

"Elaine, please close that door. This man is crazy."

"Crazy!" cried Fay. "Order your crew to lower a boat and put me ashore! I'll report the trunk matter to the authorities."

"The trunk. I know of no trunk."

"You do!" Fay stepped close to Holgate. He put all his force into a direct accusation. He realized that the stakes were high. There was a faint chance that the yachtsman would brazen the matter and defy him.

"You—do," he repeated with a world of meaning. "You entertained a man from Boston. I saw you playing golf with him. You lured him up to your suite. You quarreled with him. You struck him with a blunt instrument. You killed him. You—"

"Oh, don't!" cried Elaine. "This detective knows everything. He must have been watching."

"I know somebody'll swing if I'm put ashore," said Fay.

Holgate raised a wrinkled hand for silence. His seamed and yellow face turned to a greenish hue. There was no blood in his lips.

"What is your price?" he asked.

"I've no price. I want justice done to my client."

"Don't you know that such a killing as you describe might have been an accident? Don't you know that a man might strike another in self-defense?"

"He might, Mr. Holgate, but he wouldn't pack a body in a sheet-steel trunk and pour in lime. He wouldn't do that—would he?"

"He might."

Fay fastened upon the millionaire the glance of an eagle about to swoop. He squared his shoulders. His jaw hardened.

"You're guilty, Holgate! The law must take its course. I'm only sorry—for your niece's sake. Your financial record speaks for itself."

"What's that got to do with the unfortunate death of Mr. Frisbee?"

"Ah!" said Fay, "you admit it? Frisbee, yes. Frisbee was my client."

"I admit nothing. I deny nothing. I

have already communicated with the police by wireless. They say that Mr. Frisbee's body was found in Chicago."

Fay's eyes glittered.

"Found is good," he said, playing his last card. "It was left there by Mr. Raker and myself, after we had made a complete investigation. Raker, here, wanted to come on to New York and see you. He tempted me—to be false to my clients. We're a small agency. He suggested that money might hush the thing up. Now, I'm no blackmailer. I don't even want you to admit the murder. Perhaps it was an accident."

"It was, almost!" exclaimed Elaine.

Fay turned to the girl.

"Almost, Miss Holgate?"

"Elaine!" screamed Holgate. "Don't say a word to this man. He may be a California detective.

"You're afraid of extradition?" asked Fay.

"They can't extradite me!"

"They could extradite the president, if he were guilty of a murder such as you committed. I don't doubt that you struck Frisbee an unpremeditated blow. I don't doubt it at all, but you shouldn't have been so careless in covering up your tracks. Why, I know who got the lime for you. You forced—"

"Don't!" sobbed Elaine. "Uncle, don't let this man stay here. Give him money and send him away. I detest the sight of him."

"Thanks," said Fay.

"Shall I call a boat?" asked Rake.

Holgate's sallow complexion turned the color of ox blood. He ground his yellow teeth. He glared from Rake to Fay.

"You'll not leave my yacht!"

"Why?" asked the cracksman, pressing Rake and the girl aside and squarely confronting the millionaire. "Why, Mr. Holgate?"

"You know too much, young man."

"I know enough to keep silent—if the price is paid."

"What is your price?"

"One hundred thousand to each of us. A safe passage to Panama or the Azores. The money must be paid to-night."

The yachtsman breathed deeply. He stared over Fay's shoulder. Elaine nodded her head. The cracksman caught the silent signal. He waited with every sense alert. He rocked back and forth on his toes like a man who would spring.

"So you're an ordinary blackmailer!" exclaimed Elaine. "I thought you were when I saw you on that train."

Fay's turn came to flush. He rounded.

"You keep still!" he said to the indignant girl. "Your uncle and I will conclude this matter—one way or the other."

"I'll not keep still—Mr. Blackmailer. My uncle's interests are mine."

"You helped him kill Frisbee. It was you who got the lime."

"He didn't murder Mr. Frisbee. He didn't!"

"A good sticker," whispered Rake admiringly. "What a gun-moll she would make."

Fay thought rapidly. He was on thin ice. He had never acted in a shady rôle before. His business had been an open defiance to the powers that ruled. He was a "heavy man" in the argot of the underworld. A heavy man went after big jobs, such as banks and jewel safes.

"I want that money to-night," he said without enthusiasm. "It must be paid right away. Otherwise I am going to request you, Mr. Holgate, to set me ashore."

"Have you the money on the yacht, Uncle? If you have, for goodness sake, pay this man."

Fay studied Elaine's expression. There was scorn in her hate for him. She moved to the door of the cabin and opened it slightly. Glancing out upon the dark deck, she turned her head and repeated:

"Have you the money, Uncle? Is there any way to buy this creature's silence. You know it will only be temporary.

Blackmailers, like him, always come back."

Holgate shook his head.

"There isn't any cash to speak of on the yacht. I can't give him a check. He'll have to wait, while we think it over."

"You lie!" snapped Fay. "What became of the millions in gold that were brought to the Glorianna by motor trucks from the Subtreasury? Where is the bullion?"

Holgate stared at Fay.

"The millions," he said, "are not on this yacht. How did you know the gold was moved from New York?"

"I'm a detective," said Fay. "I pride myself on being fairly well posted on your affairs, Mr. Holgate."

"You seem altogether too sure of the gold. I suppose that is what brought you out here?"

"I came out about the murder. I'm willing to hush it up—at a price. I have lost my position by not reporting what I learned to the proper authorities in Chicago. I hesitated. I now must give up my profession and leave the country. Your secret will be safe when you land Mr. Raker and me at Panama or the Azores. I'm doing a lot to save you, Mr. Holgate."

"There is something in that," mused Holgate. "Elaine, this young man has made a somewhat reasonable request. The trouble is I can't accommodate him with the money—to-night. It isn't aboard this yacht."

"Then it's on the Glorianna."

"It's not on the Glorianna!" exclaimed Elaine. "That is, it—"

Holgate moved to his niece's side. He drew her away. He whispered a pleading series of instructions. "Do that," he said, "and this, please. Don't go back on me, girl. You know—"

Fay's ears were very keen. He sensed part but not all of the old man's instructions. He furrowed his brow and tried to fathom the reason for the girl's statement that the gold was not on board either yacht. She had probably kept something back. The chances were that the bullion was in the Standart's hold.

"Hurry!" said the cracksman glancing at his watch. "It's after one o'clock. Decide, one way or the other. Jail and indictment and a trial for you—or two hundred thousand dollars for my silence. I'll answer for Mr. Raker."

"It's a bleedin' shame," blurted Rake, "'ow these money-bags 'old on to their money!"

Elaine finished whispering to her uncle. She glided to Fay's side, after a crushing glance at Rake.

"We've decided," she said. "You may have the money as soon as we can get it. Uncle will wireless for it in the morning. In the meantime. you may go to a cabin and keep off the deck. Uncle has been greatly excited. He may have a spell. He is not a young man. This may kill him—Mr. Conroy!"

"I hardly think so. Any man who could pack a body in a trunk is not easily killed!"

"Go to your cabin, sir!"

"Where is it?" asked Fay.

"I'll show you."

Fay glanced at Rake. The cockney pulled down his cap, lifted the two bags and smirked toward Holgate.

"After you," he said.

Elaine pulled the door open, bent her head, glanced up and down the deck, then, after a second's pause, led the way for her uncle and Fay to an alleyway upon each side of which were a number of curtained entrances.

"Go in there," she said, pointing between two portieres. "Shut the door after you. Don't come on deck, or disturb us. You will have your freedom and the money in the morning."

Fay nodded and pressed the cockney forward. He turned and stared from Elaine to Holgate.

"I'll give you until seven o'clock to get the money."

"Make it noon!" snarled the millionaire. "I'll have to wireless my bankers. They will send it out to me."

"Noon, then," said Fay.

"Beast!" exclaimed Elaine.

Fay went through the curtains. He tested the door and drew it shut. Turning, he looked around the suite. Rake stood with open mouth and saucered-eyes.

"Gol blym!" he exclaimed. "This looks like Bucking'am Palace."

"Or a prison."

"Can't be."

"Men have been made away with on yachts."

"Blym few, Chester. I like this place."

Fay went through a doorway and stared at a set of brass beds over which hung silk canopies. Rare tropic scenes were painted on the panels of the tiny room. The gleam of silver-plated plumbing and white tiling showed through a second opening.

The cracksman began unpacking the two bags. He glanced at his reflection in a cheval mirror.

"I need a shave," he said. "I need sleep. We're fortunate, for two detectives, Rake."

The cockney pointed a finger toward a button.

"Shall I ring for wine?"

"No! Lie down and get some rest."

"There's a lot of questions I'd like to arsk you."

"They'll keep until morning. We're in no danger here. A millionaire's secret is a gold mine."

"'Is niece—Yellow Top—may figure out who an' wot we are."

Fay rubbed his chin. He found a cigarette in his coat pocket and lighted it.

Between fragrant puffs he said:

"Miss Holgate is a lady. She will protect her uncle to the end. That means she will hush us up with money and get us to Panama or the Azores. We're doing her a good turn. Suppose we should tell the police what we know?"

Rake started to answer Fay. He swayed and grasped at the nearest support. He laid a hand on his stomach.

"We're under way!" he cried.

"Yes, Rake. I felt the screw throbbing some time ago. Holgate must have given the order to up-anchor as soon as he left us."

"Where are we going?"

"Out into the Atlantic. We're probably headed for the Sound and Block Island."

"Why?"

"I don't know, Rake. We'll find out in the morning."

CHAPTER VI

PRISONERS

THE sun came over the rim of the world and brought out the details of the splendid cabin wherein reclined Fay and Rake.

Fay tossed the covers from his bed and hinged upward. He dressed and went to a porthole. He saw the fast-flying shores of Long Island on the starboard quarter. The Standart, driven to her extreme speed, was bearing directly to sea. She swung in a slow arc until her course was south and west. The golden globe of the sun lay over the port waist.

"We're going to Sandy Hook," said Fay. "Holgate went around the island. I wonder why?"

The cockney finished shaving the blue stubble from his chin before he answered.

"Blym if I know. Blym if I care. Ain't we living like kings. The bloomin' water was hot in the tap."

"We're in hot water, a'l right, Rake. The shift, of course, means that Holgate has changed his mind. He's heading for New York. He could have saved a lot of coal and time by going through Hell Gate."

"What's 'e going to New York for?"

"I don't know. The races are to take place off the Hook. There's the chance

that he wanted sea room to think things over. I expect a surprise this morning."

"Won't we get the money?"

"We may. But I look for a fight on his part. He has too much power to give in to us."

Fay studied the cabin's furnishings. There was a shelf of books between two portholes. Over these books hung a marine. It was a painting of a full-rigged ship breaking through a fog.

He stepped up to this painting, arched his brows as he saw it was a Turner, then, dropping to one knee on the deck, he ran over the books and repeated their titles.

"Who's Who" attracted his attention. He drew it out and started turning the leaves. He first looked up Holgate. Ten lines of fine type were devoted to the yachtsman.

"Rake," he called.

"Yes, Chester."

"This is news. Holgate is an inventor. He got his start in life by inventing a churn. He was born in '56. That's some time ago. The book goes on to show that he's a multimillionaire, philanthropist, yachtsman, patron of the arts, and—"

" 'E must 'ave paid well for that. 'E's no philanthropist. 'E ain't!"

Fay smiled.

"No—you're dead, bang right, Rake! He's anything but that. This book informs us that Holgate has but one niece —Elaine."

"Good thing for us 'e 'asn't got more like 'er. She's a vixen!"

"I don't blame her for treating us the way she did," mused Fay as he turned the pages of the book.

Suddenly he glanced at the cockney.

"More information, Rake. Here is something that is definite. Frisbee—the murdered man—was a yacht designer of note. He was born in Maine. He designed the Priscilla and the Penobstock and the sloop Calypso—that won the Kaiser's Cup before the war. He was well known in Boston club circles."

"And 'Olgate murdered 'im?"

"Yes!"

"Did Frisbee design the Glorianna?"

"I don't know. This book was printed last year. The racing sloop was built this spring. It wouldn't give it, Rake."

"Why did the old devil kill Frisbee? 'E looked like a 'armless crack when I saw 'im in that 'otel at Orangelands."

Fay shook his head and started replacing the book.

"Who knows?" he said. "They probably quarreled over money or a design or something. Perhaps Frisbee had something on Holgate?"

"A secret? Another murder?"

"Perhaps."

Rake stared across the cabin.

" 'Ow about Yellow Top?" he asked. "Don't the book say anything about 'er?"

Fay shook his head and reached for the book.

"It might," he said, moving toward a porthole. "Holgate's history was at the bottom. I never thought of turning over the leaf. Ah, here it is:

" 'Elaine Holgate'—middle name is Cynthia. 'Born in Newport, 1899. Only daughter of James Holgate deceased and Elizabeth Preston Holgate deceased. Fads: Golfing, fencing, riding, motoring and prison reform.' She—"

"Prison reform?"

"That's what it says, Rake. You know a lot of good people are morbidly curious about the fellow inside."

"Blym! I take back wot I said about 'er. She's all right!"

"Yes—perhaps she is. She's a sticker for her uncle. She knows what a scoundrel he is. She knows he has an awful temper. She perhaps knows more than that. Yet, she sticks up for him."

"A regular skirt!"

"Be careful of that slang. Detectives don't use it."

Rake leered at Fay. "Detectives!" he snorted. "They're as bad as we are!"

"Some are. It's all the viewpoint, Rake. You're looking at a natural enemy

when you mention a detective. They're looking at their prey when they mention crooks."

Having given Rake something to think over, Fay replaced the book on the shelf, crossed the cabin and peered through the thick glass of a starboard porthole. He saw the fine line which marked the horizon. Dancing waves sparkled the ocean. A tiny white sail showed.

"Making due west for Sandy Hook," he said. "We ought to reach it by noon at this speed. This yacht must have twin screws."

"I wonder hif hit's got a pantry? I'm gettin' blym 'ungry."

"They'll probably give us breakfast. I heard seven bells strike a little while ago. What shall we do if Holgate flatly refuses to pay the two hundred thousand?"

"Go ashore and squeal!"

"We can do that. He probably will figure on that action. There is no reason to think that he doesn't believe we are detectives. There are lots of private agencies in Boston."

Rake glanced sharply at a curtain. A knocking was followed by the swift sliding of the door. A steward appeared bearing a silver tray. Upon it were smoking biscuits, oatmeal, eggs and coffee.

Fay motioned for the cockney to keep silent as the steward arranged the meal on the center table of the larger cabin. He laid two spotless napkins across the racks. He brought up chairs.

"Breakfast is served, gentlemen," announced the servant.

"Thank you," said Fay. "You needn't wait. We can serve ourselves."

"Why didn't you arsk 'im where we were going?" inquired the cockney after the door to the deck had closed softly.

"Never question a menial," said Fay. "Sit down. Eat. Say nothing. I expect we shall have visitors belong long."

"Can't we go out and see where we're going?"

"I can tell by the sun that we're heading for the Hook—or near there. That's enough. We shouldn't show ourselves to anybody. Our part is to play safe. Suppose some of the crew recognize us?"

"'Ow could they?"

Fay poised a butter knife.

"Very easily," he said. "What did Dan the Dude tell us about Harry Raymond and the others of his mob?"

The cockney grew pale.

"Are any of them aboard this yacht?"

"Yes, there's probably one, at least. You know how Harry works. He is after the gold. He most certainly would have one of his pals somewhere around."

Rake bunched his napkin and glided to the portholes on the starboard side of the cabin. He peered through each. He studied those of the crew he saw polishing brass along the rail and performing the morning duties of the yacht. He heard a hose hissing. He crossed the cabin and glanced astern. He recoiled and stepped back to Fay's side.

"What did you see?" asked the cracksman. "Some one of Harry's mob?"

"No! I saw more than that, Chester. There's a great big cove out there with brass buttons and a gold-striped cap. 'E's directin' the hose. 'E's got a whackin' scar across his chin. 'E's got 'ands like a boatswain. Last time I saw 'im was in prison. 'E's 'Arry, 'imself. Blym, hif 'e ain't!"

"Harry Raymond—the heavy man?"

"'E's there—as big as life. 'E must be watchin' hus!"

"No," said Fay, musingly. "He is on this yacht for another reason. He probably joined the crew to look for the gold. Others of his gang may be aboard."

"Then we can't go out on deck?"

"It wouldn't be advisable. You see, we're supposed to be detectives. We must play that rôle down to the end."

An hour passed. The fast yacht glided west and south. The low shore of Long Island lay to starboard. Fire Island was left astern. Fay paced fore and aft the

cabin. His mind was on the situation, which was not to his liking. The presence of Harry Raymond, otherwise Big Scar, indicated that an attempt was being made to locate the bullion brought from the Subtreasury.

Rake coughed a sharp signal. Voices were heard outside the door. Fay folded his arms and eyed the rich portieres. He raised on his toes, smiled coldly, and nodded to Holgate and Elaine as they stepped into the cabin.

"Good morning," he said.

"Damn you, good morning!" growled the millionaire. "You've given me a lot of trouble, young man."

"I'm doing it for your sake and your niece's, sir."

Elaine regarded Rake icily. She stared with leveled lashes at Fay.

"You're not doing it for my sake!" she exclaimed. "You're doing it for money, which we have sent for and will give you. Uncle has wirelessed to New York for the sum you mentioned. It will be brought to Atlantic Highlands by two men who are taking the Sandy Hook boat. We won't miss you."

"That's to be expected, Miss Holgate."

"Did you breakfast?"

Fay pointed to the table. "Thanks," he said. "We breakfasted — and owe that much to you. Detectives are, as a rule, hearty eaters — particularly when they are closing up a murder case."

Elaine flushed.

"You brute!" she cried. "You can't refrain from that subject. I had hoped that your silence could be bought—temporarily."

"We haven't the money yet. Perhaps—"

"You'll have it!" said Holgate. "Just wait! You'll be paid in bills and sent on your way—to the other side. I have arranged with my bankers for two passages on the Nordland which passes the Hook at three o'clock. We will put you and your man aboard that ship. Passports, tickets and everything will be vised for you. Incidentally, young men, having forgotten your names, I have booked you as Mr. Smith and Mr. Brown.

"Poor names," said Fay. "Mr. Raker, don't you think they are very ordinary?"

"They'll do!" the cockney snickered. "Anything will do. 'E's forcin' us to leave our business and our friends. What will Boston say?"

"I should think Boston would be very glad to get rid of you two."

Fay smiled genially at Elaine's outburst. The girl was frank. The contrast between her and Holgate was marked. She was tall, slender, outspoken. He was seamed, vinegary. He could not have weighed over one hundred pounds. A more than ordinary bulge behind his shoulders indicated that he was a cripple. A master tailor had almost succeeded in effacing the hunch. It showed when the millionaire turned suddenly or bent far over.

Holgate started toward the deck.

"Just a moment," said Fay.

"What is it?"

"Don't go yet. There's a matter which isn't settled."

The yachtsman turned. His hand dropped as Fay asked:

"How about Frisbee's widow?"

"He didn't leave a widow," said Elaine.

Fay had not been sure of this premise.

"A woman retained Mr. Raker and I to follow him to Orangelands. We thought it was Mr. Frisbee's wife."

"She said so," added Raker, lying handsomely.

"So that's how you happened to be out there?" said Elaine. "That's why you were on the train?"

"That is why," Fay said. "This woman must have been a friend of the designer. I'm glad she wasn't the wife of the poor man—whom Mr. Holgate struck so viciously."

Holgate turned livid. His lips moved and he tried to speak. He glared at Fay. Elaine grasped her uncle's arm.

"We must go to the deck," she whispered. "This man is driving you into another rage. Don't listen to him. Just pay him and send him away."

"But he'll come back!" screamed Holgate. "I'll kill him if he does!"

"Oh, Uncle, don't!"

"I'll kill him if he ever sets foot on this side of the Atlantic. I'll kill him—the blackmailer! The black—"

Fay heard the door slide swiftly shut.

"Nice old man," he said to Rake.

"A dangerous cove, Chester! 'E's not going to let us go so easily."

Fay nervously crossed the cabin. He fingered the objects of art on top of the bookcase. He lifted an ivory tusk, dropped it, glanced at the painting by Turner, then wheeled and strode to the nearest porthole which overlooked the after part of the yacht.

He saw Harry Raymond, alias Big Scar, looming over a squad of men in duck and open-throated jerseys. The big yegg and bank robber was a compelling sight. His huge shoulders shelved forward. His fingers coiled and uncoiled as he profanely snarled his orders.

Fay knew that he could enlist the crook for any desperate enterprise. His presence on the Standart indicated that an attempt would be made to rob Holgate during the yacht races. Harry Raymond had acted as his own gay-cat and advance man. He, no doubt, had a small cutter in case of emergency. This boat was likely to come through Hell Gate and lay near the anchoring place of the racing fleet.

Fay turned from the porthole. He watched Rake, who was packing the two bags. The slow swinging of the yacht indicated a light sea. The sun was at zenith. Heat rose from the holystoned planks of the deck. Spirals of vapor hid much of the outer view.

"We're two cads!" Fay blurted suddenly. "I hate this blackmail thing, Rake. Think of that sweet girl's opinion of us—cheap detectives who happened to stumble upon a more or less justified homicide and twisted it to their own ends. I'll gamble Holgate struck Frisbee with provocation. Then he forced poor Elaine to help pack the body in the jewel trunk."

"That's just wot 'e did! But we can't do anything. It's 'anging for hus hif we go ashore and try to dodge the bobbies. We're safer on this ship."

"It isn't that, Rake. It's the girl's contempt that rankles. I never blackmailed anybody in my life. I don't like it."

"Are you going to cave and tell 'Olgate we're a couple o' crooks?"

"No. He is bad, as you said. But the girl is sweet. There's something fine in her."

"She's a sticker! She can 'ate better than anyone I know. She looks daggers at me and you."

Fay crammed his hands in his pockets, and made the round of the cabin and stared out through a brass-rimmed porthole. It came to him like a sudden blow that he was mixed up in a dastardly action against a charming girl.

The entrance to New York Harbor, with the buoys of the channel showing like bobbing corks, loomed invitingly. A low bank, which resembled gray clouds, marked the Atlantic Highlands. Out from it, like a woman's taper finger, was thrust Sandy Hook. Toward this point the Standart was steaming at full speed. Her well-balanced engines vibrated the decks slightly. Her single, squat funnel, painted a robin-blue, sent forth a streamer of smoke that carpeted the ocean astern.

"We'll be in soon," Fay said to Rake. "Have you the bags packed? Look everywhere. I left a pair of pajamas in my stateroom."

"Got everything, Chester. What's the office when the two men come aboard with the money? Shall I keep mum and look wise?"

"Yes." Fay's voice was undecided.

He found a cigarette in his pocket and lighted it. He glanced at the rich rug which covered the deck.

"Yes," he repeated. "Look wise and say nothing. We'll take the cash, wait for the Nordland, and go abroad. But—"

"But what, Chester?"

"I despise myself. I'd rather, a thousand times, steal the money. I never had any use for blackmail or blackmailers. It isn't in my line at all. It's dirty work!"

Rake rose from the bags. He held a warning finger to his lips.

"The engine's stopped," he said. "We must be there."

Fay glided to the door, pulled it open, and looked out across the deck and over the rail.

The towering, wooded heights of Atlantic Highlands were close at hand. The roofs of a summer colony showed within the green. A pier, a score or more of amusement booths and dancing pavilions, marked the beach.

A cutting voice shouted an order from the bridge of the yacht. The screws thrashed. The bow swung out toward the channel. A small launch, with two men sitting in the cockpit, danced over the water. It came gliding to the lowered landing-stage of the Standart.

Fay, with his keen face pressed in the opening between the door and the chamfering, heard the two men leap to the deck. He watched and saw that one carried a small alligator bag strapped or handcuffed to his right wrist.

Holgate, in skull cap and blue coat, came aft with the men and Elaine. The millionaire spoke testily. He gesticulated. He roamed the deck with his squinting eyes. They alighted on Fay.

"There he is," said Elaine. "There is the man you are to give the money to."

The two messengers glanced at Holgate for confirmation.

"Yes! Yes!" he said. "Give him the tickets and money. Turn it all over to him. Come here, Conroy."

Fay reached backward and clapped his hand on the bulge which marked his automatic. There was that to the two men which denoted danger. Both were heavy-shoed and huge-built. Both had square jaws and small black mustaches of the bull-dog variety. They resembled detectives from Central Office.

"Come in this cabin," said the cracksman, backing from the opening. "Come in here, if you want to talk to me."

"What's the matter?" asked the thoroughly-aroused Rake.

The cockney had detected the fighting note in Fay's voice.

"Sisst! I think they're Dicks from Center Street."

Rake sprang to his bag, unlocked it, struggled with the catches and whipped out a British regulation revolver. He crammed it into his pocket as he rose and joined Fay.

Holgate entered the cabin followed by the two men. Elaine stood framed between the portieres. She stared from Fay to Rake who were as alert and watchful as two fox terriers.

"Look out, Uncle!" she cried. "I think these gentlemen are armed!"

"Let them be armed! All I want is to get rid of them. I wish I could throw them overboard."

"Or hit them on the head," suggested Fay.

Holgate paled at a murderous memory. He nudged the nearest messenger.

"Give that man the money—two hundred thousand—and the passports and tickets. Give it to him—remember his face and go back to New York. Forget this transaction."

"Mike!" The messenger with the alligator bag strapped to his right wrist turned and glanced at his companion.

"What is it, Ed?" he asked.

"Say, Mike, do you know that little fellow standing there? The one near the grips. Ever see him before, Mike?"

"Can't say that I have, Ed."

"Oh, yes, you have. That's Nollie

Matches, alias the Twinkler, alias English Joe. Remember the guy who made that touch in the Hoffman House? Remember the one we sent up River for three years? The cockney—"

"Well, so it is!" declared the astonished messenger. "Hello, Nollie! What are you doing here?"

Fay saw the situation with the lightning analysis of a professional. The two messengers were old-time Byrnes men from the days of the show-up and Fulton Street deadline. They had been sent out by Holgate's bankers to protect the money.

"What's this?" snarled Holgate. "Is that man a crook?"

"Oh, yes," said the detective who had recognized Nollie Matches, alias Rake. "He's one. He's mugged in every prison and gallery in this country. Do you want me to give him this money?"

The millionaire shot a crafty glance at Fay.

"How about him?"

The messengers and ex-detectives studied the cracksman. Fay returned their stare boldly. He allowed the ghost of a smile to cross his lips.

"Don't remember him," said the nearest detective.

"He told me he was a private investigator located in Boston. He belongs to the Conroy and Dudley Agency."

"There ain't no such agency, boss. If one of these two is a crook, the other is. Shall we give them the money? Ain't it some game?"

Holgate made a sign to come out upon the deck. The ex-detectives scowled meaningly at Rake and followed the millionaire. Fay went to Elaine who had allowed her uncle to pass through the doorway.

"I suppose," he suggested, "you won't let us off the yacht, now. Don't you know that a secret is never dead—that murder will out?"

"I don't think you will ever get off the Standart. I'm pleased because you're not cheap blackmailers or private detectives. I'm glad of that, but—you know too much."

"What is your uncle going to do to us?"

The girl turned her head.

"Make you walk the plank!"

"Answer me! I'm armed!"

"That won't do you any good. Put your hand down. Go and make yourself comfortable."

"But what does your uncle intend doing?"

"I don't know what he intends doing. I know what I am going to do to you and your friend."

"What is that?"

"Retain these men who came out to guard you in the cabin. Keep you there until after the races. You may consider yourselves prisoners."

The door closed. Fay heard Elaine's voice giving orders to the ex-detectives. Holgate assented.

A bell clanged in the yacht. The screws throbbed.

"Hit's hall my blym fault!" whimpered Rake. "'Ow did I know who was coming to give us the money? 'Ow could I know that?"

"Rake," said Fay, "sit down and quit that noise. We're in luck—after all. We didn't soil our hands with the blackmail. I would have hated myself all my life if I had taken that money."

"But what are we going to do?"

"Watch things. We passed up two hundred thousand. There are millions in swag somewhere on this ship. We can get that if we are clever!"

CHAPTER VII

UNWELCOME GUESTS

TO the man who had lived by his wits too long — to the keenest brain in the underworld — the situation on board the yacht Standart was not exactly depressing.

Fay took stock of the possibilities

offered him and Rake. There was every chance that Holgate, guilty of the crime, whether premeditated or not, of murdering Frisbee, would attempt to detain his unwilling guests on board the yacht.

The arrival of the two detectives, both somewhat thick of speech and thought, had lifted the cracksman out of the blackmailing class and into the realms of his own calling.

He recalled with a sly smile, not unbecoming to his features, that the millionaire was between the devil and the deep sea.

"Rake," he said buoyantly, "we're going to cash big on this event. We've discarded the two hundred thousand—a little game. We're aboard a yacht that holds millions—more or less. We've got the owner's secret. He dare not let us go. He dare not keep us here long. He must buy our silence in the end or take the consequences."

"What consequences, Chester?"

"Of having us aboard. We'll connect with Big Scar and enlist our forces with him. Harry isn't acting the part of a bucko mate for nothing. He probably knows where the gold is secreted."

"'Ow about the two bobbies? I 'ear them outside. They're standin' guard—one on each side of the door."

"Just like them, Rake. Can't we cut through the deck or up through the roof of this cabin?"

"When?"

"To-night, or any other night."

"But there's the crew, Chester."

"Some of them may be Harry's pals. Some may be mutinous. We can manage it, Rake."

The cockney grew cheerful. He made the round of the cabin, investigated the tiling in the bathroom and crawled under the beds which were fastened to the deck by brass straps. He came back to Fay who had pressed his face to a porthole glass.

"Wot's below?"

Fay turned away from his view of the sea. He measured the width of the cabin from starboard to port.

"The engine room—we're over the engines."

"Wot's up there?" Rake pointed to the ceiling.

"A boat deck."

"It's a cinch, that way. When do you want me to start cutting?"

"Wait until we hear from Holgate or Elaine. I notice that the yacht is under slow headway. That means she is waiting for the rest of the fleet to come out through the Narrows."

Rake left Fay's side and tiptoed to the curtains which covered the door. He came back.

"It ain't locked," he said. "The door is easy. We could pull our guns and rush those two detectives."

"Where would we get to? The crew, or part of them, would stop us. Holgate could say that we were wanted for some crime, that the guards he had posted were waiting for instructions from headquarters. We better stay here and attempt to get in communication with Big Scar. I think I know a way."

"'Ow?"

"By a ruse."

Rake removed his cap and rubbed his bald head.

"A simple ruse," added Fay. "Remember when we saw Harry?"

"Yes—this morning. 'E was swabbing the deck, or 'aving it done."

"He will do the same thing to-morrow morning. We'll get a stick, tie a piece of lead or chalk to the end and reach through a porthole. We'll write a sign on the deck planks. He will see it. He don't know who Holgate is keeping prisoner. He wasn't on deck last night when we came aboard at City Island."

"Suppose those detectives 'ave recognized 'im? 'E's a well-known crook."

"I don't think they have. You see they knew you because one of them had you arrested or testified against you at your trial."

"That was Ed. Gumshoe Ed!"

"He couldn't ever forget you, Rake."

The cockney stared at himself in a cheval glass. Fay sat down on a divan, whipped out a cigarette and lighted it with a quick scratch of a match across the deck planks.

He leaned back. The gray smoke wreathed to the painted ceiling of the cabin. It mushroomed out and floated toward a gilded ventilator. Fay studied this means of egress. He tossed the cigarette into a brass cuspidor and leaped to his feet.

"I have it!" he exclaimed. "That ventilator leads to a hole in the roof. Above the hole is a grating or a skylight. We can climb through there tonight and leave the yacht. We can go over the heads of the two guards—anytime."

"'Ow about our friend, 'Arry? 'E's—"

"I'd like to get the swag without him. The more people we have in it—the less money we get."

"But you were going to write a sign on the deck so 'Arry would know we were 'ere."

"I think that will be necessary. You see, Rake, we must have a boat take us from the yacht. I can't swim at all. Suppose we get in communication with Harry, arrange for the boat—he is a deck officer and he can probably lower one any time—and make the attempt to escape to-morrow night."

"Suits me, Chester."

Fay searched the cabin and found a curtain pole. He removed the brass rings, cut a piece of cord from a cretonne chair-cover, and tied a lead pencil securely to one end of the improvised rod.

"Open the after porthole glass," he whispered to Rake. "I'll make a sign on the deck directly beneath it. Big Scar will recognize the old yeggs' mark and know that there's pals inside who are in hiding from the police. Do you know the mark, Rake?"

"Can't say that I do."

"Tramps use it to indicate a good house for eats."

Fay thrust the pole through the porthole, first assuring himself that there was no one on that part of the deck between the cabin and a mahogany-trimmed longboat which hung in davits.

He slowly traced a circle on the holystoned planks. He pointed an arrow toward the cabin. He went over his marks until they were distinct. The result, as he drew in the pole and pressed his face to the small opening, was not unlike a plimsoll mark—found near the waterline of a ship.

It would serve to notify the big yegg that he was expected to communicate with the occupants of the cabin. It would most certainly be noticed by the sailors who swabbed the decks during the morning watches. They would call their officer's attention to it.

The mark on the deck outside the cabin was not detected by the crew during the afternoon watches. Fay grew hungry and somewhat worried. He realized that the wireless might be signalling any number of things to New York. One of the two detectives disappeared from the door for a period of time marked by the striking of six bells on the forepeak of the Standart.

A steward appeared with a belated dinner. Fay leaned back on the divan and eyed the man. He overlooked no single detail. He finished the meal and rose from the table before he suggested to Rake that Holgate's servants looked underpaid or cowed.

"I'd rather work for a poor man than a millionaire, Chester."

"They're hard! That steward looks as if he could be bought for fifty dollars. I don't think we will have any trouble getting away. If the worst comes to the worst—we can bribe our passage ashore."

"Maybe this bloomin' yacht will tie to a dock."

"I don't think so. Holgate would give

the world to be far out in the Atlantic. He's a worried man."

Elaine's voice was heard as she questioned the watching detectives.

"Are they still in there?" Fay heard her ask. "You know what we found out about both of them."

Rake grinned sheepishly. He started to speak. The door slid open. The girl appeared. She stared at Fay with interest.

"So you're quite famous," she said. "We wirelessed your description to Center Street. We had them look up all the bad men who might be you. I understand that you have served time in England and at Devil's Island."

"Mistaken identity!" snapped Fay.

"No. Your name is Chester Fay, alias Edwin Letchmere, alias a lot of other nice names. Your profession is safe-robbing and stealing jewelry. I believe you thought you were getting my jewel trunk when you substituted the checks in Orangelands."

Fay gallantly offered the girl a chair. She shook her head. She turned toward Rake.

"Mr. Ed Dunovan recognized you. He says you are in good company when you are with a man like Mr. Fay. He was rather surprised!"

"I'm blym sure I don't know what you are talking about, Miss."

Elaine's eyes widened. She tossed the tassel of a Tam o' Shanter over her shoulder. She moved gracefully to a porthole and glanced out. Suddenly she wheeled upon Fay, who had not seated himself.

"You fooled us!" she said hotly. "I thought at first you were a private detective. I see how you happened to adopt that rôle. It was all an accident. You fled to this ship and threw yourself on our protection because the police were after you."

Fay bit his lips. It was easy to accuse the girl of guilty knowledge in the matter of the murder. He could tell her that the reason he came to the yacht was a forced one, due to her uncle's hasty action in striking Frisbee and secreting the body of the Boston man in the jewel trunk.

"I'll say this," he offered, "I'll admit that I don't know why your uncle changed his mind and placed us under a guard. He is playing with fire. We can be pushed too far, Miss Holgate."

"What do you mean?"

"There are people ashore who are expecting to hear from us, either by wireless or by mail. We told them that we were coming out to this yacht. One of our dear friends holds a sealed letter which directly accuses Mr. Holgate of the murder of Mr. Frisbee. This man may open the letter if he doesn't hear from us within a certain time."

Fay seemed sure of his position. He was quick-witted enough to manufacture a possible situation which would cause the girl concern. He watched her for some sign of weakening. He saw none.

"I don't believe that, at all!"

"It's true, Miss Holgate. The letter is in the hands of a man named Dan the Dude. He is a business man! He will most certainly take advantage of any information it contains and get money from your uncle, if we don't."

"Money! Do you think Uncle or I care about money?"

Rake sniffed the air and went to the door. He stood between the girl and the waiting detectives.

Fay bowed.

"Why did your uncle change his mind about letting us go on the Nordland?"

"Because he realized that you were more dangerous than he thought. He now knows that you are very dangerous. The police of New York say you are wanted for the murder of Mr. Frisbee. If they catch you for that murder, you know what will happen to you?"

"To me?"

"Yes!"

"I think," smiled Fay, "I know what

will happen to your uncle. I can't perjure myself on the stand. I must tell the truth to save my own neck. I wouldn't stand a ghost of a chance if I kept silent."

"You wouldn't keep silent."

"That's why I wanted to get out of the country. I was willing to protect you, not your uncle."

"So he doesn't matter?"

"No! He's a rogue! A financial crook of the worst type! He hasn't got the nerve to break open a strong box or take his chances as they run. He made his money in a far more crooked manner. You know it."

"I'm his niece and see no wrong in him."

"Naturally you want to protect him."

"Yes. I can best do that by keeping you here on the ship until some way is found to seal your lips forever."

"With that letter ashore and in the hands of Dan the Dude, there is no way to hush the matter up, Miss Holgate. You must take your orders from me if you want to get out of a bad jam."

"It would go against my grain to take orders from you."

"Think it over. I'm not going to the electric chair for something your uncle did. I'm not going to squeal on him, either, if you are at all reasonable. What I want is simple."

"How simple?"

"Let me have the run of this yacht. Let me come and go as I please. Take those two detectives away. The first thing you know they will be in the secret. I can answer for Rake, here, and myself. I can answer for Dan the Dude. I can trust a crook, but I can't trust an ex-detective."

"You have a low opinion of them?"

"Yes!"

"What have they ever done to you?"

"They sent me to Dartmoor, a hell hole in England. They sent me to Devil's Island. They framed me more than once!"

"But they were trying to preserve law and order."

Fay flashed Elaine a burning glance.

"When I hate—I hate!" he said. "When I like—I like. You're a sweet girl, but willful. Do we get along together, or do we go separate ways? Remember what I know about your uncle!"

"Remember what I know about you," she said, as she glided past Rake, pulled the door open, and disappeared onto the deck.

"She's all fire and fight," said Rake. "We're going to 'ave a 'ard time with 'er."

"No. She has brains! She will think over what I proposed. Consider the situation, Rake. I'd rather trust her a thousand times than trust Holgate."

The cockney started to scratch his head. He peered at Fay.

"I see trouble of another kind, Chester. You and the skirt are getting thick. That will surely mean trouble."

Fay laid down on the divan and rested his head in his hands. He crossed his legs and stared along his body to where the curtains hid the view of the only exit to the cabin suite. His thoughts were on Elaine Holgate.

An hour passed. The yacht rolled slightly. Her screw barely turned over. The steady though balanced clamp of the engines below the deck marked less than thirty revolutions per minute.

Evening came without any interruption to Fay's thoughts. He smoked a score of cigarettes. He boxed the situation like a mariner going over the compass points. There were many possibilities of a slip-up. He relied on Elaine's seeing a way to clear the matter. He was not disappointed.

It was eight bells and midnight when the door opened and the girl entered. The bulky form of one watchman blotted out all view of the deck. The door closed softly. Rake hurried out of the bathroom. He eyed Elaine with suspicion.

"I've decided!" she said, addressing

Fay, who advanced to the center of the cabin. "Uncle and I have been talking it over. He didn't want to let you have your freedom. I insisted!"

A softer note was in Elaine's tones. Fay studied her eyes. She had been crying.

"Glad of his decision," he said. "When can we go on deck? We need fresh air."

"In the morning. You and your friend may walk from the bridge aft. Uncle has a number of friends coming out to see the races. I request that you do not try to speak to them. You are supposed to be an English yachtsman—aboard this yacht by courtesy."

"How about the two ex-detectives?"

"They'll stay aboard! They won't bother you unless you try to start something."

"I usually finish whatever I start."

"I know you do. Uncle says that you are one of the most wanted men at large."

"At large?"

"The police are very anxious to find you."

"They are more anxious to find out who murdered Mr. Frisbee."

"I wouldn't dwell on that, if I were you."

"You force me."

"Blym, yes!" exclaimed the cockney. "We're two young men tryin' to make our way in the world. And we're accused of an 'orrible trunk murder."

Fay interposed himself between the girl and Rake, who had worked his sensibilities up to an indignant height.

"We are allowed the deck in the morning, then," he said to the girl. "That's getting on. I'll give you my promise that I won't turn your uncle up to the police in any way — until I give you a day's notice. All I want is freedom of action. I'd like to know that no one is watching me. I feel safe out here. I don't over there."

Fay pointed toward the port side of the cabin. It was the general direction of New York.

"There's another matter," said Elaine, backing to the curtained door.

"What is it?"

"The yacht races will keep us in these waters for a few days. Uncle must not leave this coast. We would have taken you to the Azores or put you on a ship had it not been for the races. Uncle has his heart set on beating the Boston sloop. He wants to defend the America's Cup against the British contender. All the threats from you in the world won't move him from that determination."

"That's the only decent spark I ever saw in him!"

"The races?"

"Yes! There must be something behind his desire."

"Nothing but patriotism. He spent over three hundred thousand building the Glorianna."

"Was Frisbee the designer? Did your uncle quarrel and kill the man who built the racing sloop?"

"He quarreled with nobody! He killed nobody! Remember that, Mr. Chester Fay, alias Edward Letchmere."

The door slid within the chamfering. The curtains ceased swaying. Rake, somewhat stunned by the girl's outburst of loyalty to her uncle, touched Fay on the shirt-sleeve.

"Wake up! She's gone."

Fay sighed and turned from the door. He went into the small cabin. The sun was shining brightly when he threw his legs over the edge of the bed. Rake's snores sounded like a valve that repeated, caught, then repeated. The yacht was gliding down long ocean swells. Footsteps grated on the boat deck.

Suddenly a hissing penetrated the cabin. Fay glided to the door and stared at the small portholes. He saw a dark face framed in an after one.

Big Scar, otherwise Harry Raymond, resplendent in knitted jersey, officer's cap and a gold landyard, stood just outside the porthole. He had pressed open the glass.

"Who tuh hell are you?" whispered the yegg.

"A passenger."

"Did you make that sign on the deck?"

Fay closed one eye swiftly.

"Between pals, I did," he said. "Watch out! Don't rumble to me. Where is the gold, Scar?"

"Who are you?"

"A friend of Dan the Dude! He sent me out here."

"Mit me, then! I know where there's more bullion than ten men can lift. It's a cinch to cop!"

CHAPTER VIII

A YACHT RACE

FAY stepped back from the open porthole. He motioned for Rake to take his place.

"Assure Harry," he whispered, "that I'm all right in every way. He don't know who I am. He did time with you, didn't he?"

The cockney nodded. He glided to the opening.

"'Ello, Scar," he said. "Remember the bleedin' screw wot used to unlock our doors in the morning? The one you threw off the wall when you got away from college?"

The big yegg winked at Rake. He turned and saw that his squad of deck hands were busily polishing brasswork, aft the sheer of the cabin.

"It's me, cocky," he boomed through the porthole. "Who's the hook with you? A friend of Dan's?"

"Surest thing you know. 'E's a 'igh roller. We came out to get a look at that gold. Where is it, Scar?"

Big Scar grew suspicious. He glared at Fay's shadow.

"It's aboard," he said. "Down in the hold. There's tons of it, Cocky. Plenty for us all."

Fay drew Rake aside and took his place.

"I heard you say there were tons of bullion. Are you sure there is that much? What would Holgate be doing with all that gold aboard this yacht?"

"How do I know, pal? It was put on the Glorianna at City Island. It isn't on board the sloop now. It's 'tween decks of this yacht. Are you two with me in getting it?"

"It's a big proposition, but we're with you."

The crook rubbed his chin. He ran a thick thumb along the scar that extended from his right ear down and across his purple-veined cheek.

"See you later," he growled, turning his head suddenly. "There's somebody coming."

Fay backed from the open porthole. He heard the tramp of feet on the boat deck overhead.

"Sounds like those two bobbies," said the cockney. "They walk 'eavy enough."

"Holgate has some queer guests, to be sure. You and I invited ourselves. The detectives were called. Big Scar joined, he wasn't chosen. I expect that something will happen before many bells. This thing can't keep up, Rake."

"Why?"

"Suppose that Center Street puts two and two together and sends men out to find out why Holgate wanted to know who a man answering my description was? He evidently wirelessed police headquarters."

"'E may 'ave covered 'imself in that. 'E could 'ave 'ad 'is bankers do it for 'im."

"Good surmise, Rake. Nevertheless, the quicker we get off this yacht and on firm ground the better. We'll go on deck and see Big Scar. We'll arrange for a boat to-night. We'll be missed!"

"Habout as much as the smallpox."

Fay glanced at the bags.

"Get me out a clean shirt and a pair of those flannel trousers you bought in New York. Dress! We'll watch the yacht race. We'll see Big Scar and Elaine."

"Look out for the skirt!" warned the cockney as he dropped to his knees and started unpacking the two grips.

Fay led the way out of the cabin. They passed through the curtained alleyway and reached the rail of the yacht on the starboard side. They stood breathing deeply of the salt, sea air.

A vista revealed itself like a painting by a master. The Atlantic Highlands formed the background. Sandy Hook Light rose from the end of a sandy spit. Between the Standart and the shore were gathered a score or more of excursion steamers, black with spectators.

Fay pointed toward the open sea. "There's the starting and finishing line," he said. "Look, Rake, where those two steam yachts are at anchor. See the ball at the foremast of one. That's the Commodore's ship."

A towering sloop slithered the sparkling waves. It leaned far to port. A group of sailors were clinging to the high starboard rail. A figure swung at a tiller.

A second sloop burst out from between the excursion steamers, went about smartly and came surging, with all sails set, toward the Standart. It yawled a point. A man crouched between a close-drawn mainsail. He lifted a wheel a spoke or more and waved a free hand. He peered from under a boom and set his course for the starting line.

"That's the Glorianna!" exclaimed Fay. "See, Rake. She's as stately as a steeple. Look at the canvas she is carrying. There's the starting gun."

"Gol blym!"

"Yes. Both sloops are well handled. My money is on the Glorianna. She's a witch for speed."

"The other yacht is leading, now."

"Leading, yes, but watch Holgate's sloop eating the wind. See it running up. It's heading a point closer. See it? They'll come about with the white sloop far in the lead. It's a triangular course of ten miles to a leg. First leg is to windward."

Rake gripped the polished rail. He peered open-mouthed at the two yachts. Fay turned and studied the Standart. He ranged his glance upward. He saw the two ex-detectives standing in the shadow of a deck awning aft the funnel. They were watching like two hounds on leash.

Three men were on the bridge of the yacht. One was Holgate, in skullcap and blue coat which thinly covered his deformity. The millionaire clapped a pair of twelve-diameter glasses to his eyes. He gazed at the far-off yachts. A grim leer chased over his yellow features. He lowered the glasses and spoke to the man nearest him. It was the captain, Fay decided, by the gold braid on shoulders and cap.

The third man was familiar to Fay. He had seen the same form and face at Orangelands. It was Holgate's private secretary.

A shrill cry from aft caused the cracksman to wheel, grasp the nearest stay and lift himself upon a bucket rack. He stared over the boat deck. Elaine was perched on the taffrail of the Standart. She had wound an arm around the jackstaff. Her Tam o' Shanter was falling off. Her yellow hair rippled in the breeze. Her eyes were on the race as if nothing else in all the word mattered.

"Look at her," said Fay. "I'm afraid she will go overboard. Look, Rake!"

The cockney climbed on the rail. He squinted, fluttered his lashes and declared:

"Blym! Look out, Yellow Top!"

"Sisst!"

"She's actin' like a sea witch. She must 'ave a bet down on the race."

Fay grasped the cockney's leg. "Take your eyes away from her. Now is a good time to look for the bullion."

The cracksman edged away from the rail. He stepped between a ventilator and the after break of the combined pilot and wheel house. The two ex-detectives

were somewhere over him. The group of three men stood the bridge with their glasses fixed on the fast-flying yachts.

Some of the crew of the yacht lined the rails. Others had gone below soon after the starting gun had been fired. The chance was too good to miss.

"Right after me, Rake," Fay said. "Down this hatch. It must lead to the engine room or stokehold.

They climbed through the gloom. They reached a grating out from which showed the four cylinders of a starboard engine. A second set of cylinder-heads lay to port.

"Down here!" said Fay. "By Jove," he added for the benefit of anyone who might overhear, "this is a ripping engine room."

An oiler, with a bunch of greasy waste in his hand, touched his cap. A coal-passer came out through a bulkhead, scrutinized the steam gauge on the main pipe, then disappeared from view.

No officer showed as Fay, closely followed by Rake, went aft and inspected the shaft-alley and skin of the yacht. They peered into cubbyholes and small cabins. They got down on their knees and examined the handholes which led through the plates to the bilge. Fay pried open a bunker door and looked inside. It was filled with choice anthracite. He backed out, found a sharp-pointed bar, and speared the coal in a hasty search for the gold.

"No go!" he said coming out and closing the door. "I don't believe the gold is aft. It must be forward."

"Look out," whispered Rake.

A second engineer, by the lettering on his cap, came down the engine-room ladder and stared at Fay.

"We were looking around," explained the cracksman. "Fine engines, these. They must have cost a pretty penny."

The engineer took the proffered cigarette which Fay handed over. He pointed out the reversing gear and the engine-room telegraph. He led the way forward and through the stokehold bulkhead. A battery of four double-door Scotch boilers were arranged two to port and two to starboard. The fires were banked.

"We're at anchor," he explained. "Mr. Holgate sometimes saves coal that way."

Fay caught the miserly note and nodded understandingly. He tapped the inner skin of the stokehold and asked:

"What's outside these plates?"

"Bunkers and water ballast. The ballast is low down. The bunkers can be filled through hatches in the deck. They're filled now."

"Does Mr. Holgate ever come down here?"

"Very seldom. He has a patent on a balanced draught, which we tried out last year. It didn't work very well. I understand he is going to improve it."

"He invented a churn?"

"I believe he did," said the talkative engineer. "That worked! All inventions, particularly when a man is—well, peculiar—don't pan out the same."

"No, they don't. What's forward that bulkhead?" Fay nodded toward the bow of the yacht.

"Stores and the fo'cas'le."

"D'ye mean the forecastle where the sailors sleep?" asked the cockney innocently.

"Yes, where the sailors and bo's'ains live. Here's one now—coming for you."

Rake and Fay wheeled. Big Scar loomed in the stokehold door. His eyes lighted and reflected the banked fires of the furnaces.

"The Glorianna passed the first mark three minutes in the lead," he declared. "She's walkin' away from the Boston yacht."

Fay smiled ingenuously. He stepped up to Big Scar, alias Harry Raymond.

"Would you mind showing me the crew's quarters? We are very much interested in this yacht. I have a brother in England who has one, but not quite so big. It was built at Clydebank."

Cocky engaged the second engineer in

conversation. Big Scar and Fay passed through a low bulkhead door that led to the forehold. The yegg switched on a row of electric lights which illuminated a narrow passage between well-shored bales and boxes.

"What are these?" asked Fay, pointing to the ship's stores.

"Eats and supplies."

"What's forward of them?"

"Forrard ov them you'll find the fo'cas'le bulkhead — wot we can't get through."

The big yegg stared at the deck overhead. He rapped on the nearest case with his knuckles.

"Lookin' for the swag, are you?"

Fay nodded. "Do you know where it is?"

"No! Damn Holgate's eyes! I've been down here three times. I had the crew shift cargo as an excuse. Told the mate the ship had a list to port and needed trimming. Nothing doing, pal. The old man planted that gold for keeps."

"Are you sure it isn't in the forecastle?"

"Sure! I bunk there. A rotten hooker this—for the underguards. Bad eats and plenty ov work. I'm only stayin' on till I put my glims on the gold. Then I blow!"

"Dan the Dude told me at the Stag Hotel that you followed the gold from the Subtreasury to a shipyard at City Island. Did you?"

Big Scar shelved forward his shoulders. His eyes narrowed at a memory. A surly, yellowish gleam fired his irises. His jaw blocked as he raised his fists in a cracking oath.

"Damme yes! I tailed the trucks from Wall Street to the shipyard. I never let them out ov my sight. I had a black touring car. I prowls the yard that night with little Micky Gleason and two others ov my mob. We frisks it good. The gold was gone."

"What ship was in the yard that day?"

"The Glorianna—the same as you saw in the race. She leaves the yard and comes alongside this yacht. I'm right behind with a big kicker-boat I chartered. I couldn't get too close. There were police patrols about."

"Then you think the gold was transferred to the Standart?"

"Surest thing you know! It ain't aboard the sloop. I had that frisked from keel to truck. She's not many tons displacement. She couldn't carry all ov that gold without me noticing it on the water line. They trim them yachts very fine."

Fay stared at the bales and boxes.

"Couldn't the gold be in some of these?"

"No! They're all light. I had every one moved from starboard to port and back again. I crawled through the bilge myself. The gold is aboard, but I can't locate it."

"How about the crew. Didn't they see it transferred?"

"The crew were a close-mouthed bunch. Couldn't get anything out ov them. There was a lot ov stuff brought from time to time. None ov them remember ten or twenty tons ov heavy metal being brought aboard."

"Ten or twenty tons?"

"Sure! Sure as shootin'! It took four big trucks to bring the swag from the Treasury. Didn't I see it handled?"

Fay heard men running over the deck. He felt the slight rise and fall of the yacht. A dizzy feeling caused him to compress his lips.

A bell clanged in the engine room. Hoarse orders came down the ventilators.

"They're hoistin' anchor," rumbled Big Scar. "I guess the race is over."

"Wait a minute!"

The yegg paused on his way to the light switch which controlled the forehold circuit.

"Wot d'ye want?"

"This ten or twenty tons of gold? This enormous fortune? You must be mistaken, Scar!"

"Not a bit ov it! It's a whackin' pile of yellow boys! Why, eight men moved it from the trucks to the shipyard! I climbed a telegraph pole and watched them. They carried it into a shed."

"And no truck went back, loaded?"

"They went back empty. The swag didn't come out ov the yard. It went aboard the Glorianna, I tell you. From her it was loaded on this hooker. It's here now, but I can't locate it."

Big Scar snapped off the lights. "We must get aft," he said, leading the way to the bulkhead door. "They're going to turn on the steam. I'm wanted on deck."

"Where is your kicker-yacht?"

"In the Shrewsbury River — just around the Highlands. I got a good mob aboard her."

"Wait!" exclaimed Fay. "Don't go aft yet. I want a boat lowered to-night. I want to make a getaway from this yacht."

"Can't you leave any time?"

"Holgate invited me to stay over the races. I met him in Orangelands, California. I came on with Nollie Matches. We were looking for his niece's jewels. Now I want to get away and see if I can locate that gold."

Big Scar shook his head. He peered through the bulkhead door to where moving forms were bathed in the light from the furnace fires.

"My kicker-yacht is the Grace Darling," he whispered. "We'll go to her to-night. Say at four bells—ten o'clock."

"Make it later."

"Two bells, then. One o'clock."

"I'll be waiting on deck with Nollie."

"Right-ho! Look out. Bend your head, sir. This way, sir. There's your friend still talking to the second engineer."

Fay grasped Rake's arm.

"Let's go on deck," he said. "I understand the race is over."

They climbed the engine-room ladder and stepped out of the hatch. The Standart had swung and was bearing down on the finishing line. Her speed was not more than bare sea headway. The excursion boats blared with their sirens. The Glorianna was leading the Boston sloop by many miles. She crossed the line with her great boom swung far out and her jibs and club-topsail billowed before the pressure of the wind. A gun on the Commodore's steam yacht barked sharply. A ball fell from the foretop-mast.

"We win by nine minutes!" shouted Elaine as she ran past Fay and Rake and rapidly climbed the weather ladder to the bridge where her uncle stood with his captain and secretary.

Fay swung his glance from the girl's shapely form to the white yacht which was gliding through the fleet like a dancer on a polished floor. He sighed.

"Where's the other yacht, Rake?" he asked suddenly, turning toward the cockney.

"I can't see it. There's mist out there. She ain't one, two, three with 'Olgate's ship."

"We'll go to the cabin, Rake."

The cockney followed Fay aft and through the curtained alleyway. They opened the door, which was unlocked, and stepped into their suite.

Fay turned after Rake had closed the door.

"Here's a queer situation," he said. "Sit down. I had a long talk with Big Scar. He can't locate the gold. He's sure it came aboard. He's looked everywhere. He's shifted the cargo."

"'Ow about the cabins? Did he look in 'Olgate's rooms—or Yellow Top's?"

"Rake, there's ten or twenty tons of gold aboard this yacht. It would be too much to hide in a cabin."

"Gawan! Ten or twenty tons?"

"Yes! It's aboard. I see that we have stumbled on something as big as the world. Holgate, frightened by the murder he committed in Orangelands, must have ordered all his securities sold and converted into gold. He expected he

would have to flee the country. He had the gold sent out to this yacht. He was going away when we appeared. He kept in close touch with the police. He found, Rake, that we were suspected, owing to the fortunate, for him, shift of trunks. He now has but one thing to worry about. That's our silence. I believe we are in danger."

"'Ow?"

"A man with the money he has can buy anything. What is to prevent him having *us* murdered?"

Rake glanced about the cabin.

"Who'll do it, Chester?"

"Anybody—almost! Why, you could hire a killer on the East Side for fifty dollars. The price of a murder isn't high—these days. We'd better get ashore."

"The old cove might order us croaked!"

"That would be his move. Once we are out of the way, he is free to go and come and do what he pleases. Nobody even suspects him of the murder of Frisbee. He's too rich and powerful. I doubt right now, Rake, if the police dare touch him, mean as he is. Consider who and what he is—the owner of a cup defender, master of fifty to sixty millions, a member of all the big clubs."

Rake polished his head with his palm. "Big Scar would tie an anchor to us for a few thousand puns, Chester."

"I'm not afraid of Big Scar and his mob. They're after bigger game. The ten or twenty tons of gold is enough to interest anybody."

"I don't believe there's that much bloomin' gold in the world."

"There is! We're looking at things from a small viewpoint. It's a lot to us, but not to Holgate."

"Well," said the cockney after a pause, "what are we going to do?"

"One race is over," said Fay. "We've got a date to go ashore with Big Scar at one o'clock in the morning. We can escape then, Rake."

"Wot'll we do ashore?"

"Borrow some money—a fair-sized bank-roll from Dan the Dude. Look over the Glorianna. Search the shipyard at City Island. Then send a man or two out to this yacht for another search. They're changing crews all the time. It would be easy to get a gay-cat aboard in the guise of a sailor. He can keep us posted. The gold has got to show up some—"

Rake sprang from the divan as the door opened. Elaine came in.

"I dropped in to see if you were here," she said. "I wanted to tell you about the race. The Glorianna won by seven minutes, sixteen seconds elapsed time and over ten minutes corrected time. Isn't that fine?"

"It is!" said Fay.

"It means that Uncle's yacht defends the America's Cup."

Fay stared past the smiling girl and frowned.

"Who's at that door?" he asked.

"The two men who were there before."

"I thought you were going to trust me, Miss Holgate."

"I was—until you broke your promise."

"How did I break it?"

"You went for'ard the bridge, through the hold. You were looking for something."

"Just at the yacht."

"No!"

"I was—"

"You were looking for the gold. You broke your word. Now you must stay in this suite under a strong guard. I thought I could trust you."

"Well," admitted Fay, candidly, "I did break parole—but only a little ways, and that didn't get me anything. Mind telling me, Miss Holgate, where you keep all the bullion on this yacht? I'm going to request some if you want me to take the blame for Frisbee's murder."

Elaine backed swiftly to the door, pressed it open, shot Fay a smiling glance and cried tantalizingly:

"Why didn't you look in the boilers? You might have found something of interest there, Mr. Letchmere."

A light laugh followed. The door shut softly. Footsteps hurried down the alleyway. Fay wheeled upon Rake.

"Were all four boilers in operation?"

"Blym, yes!"

"Are you sure? Did you see fires under all of them?"

"Yes."

"Then, Rake, she is joshing us."

"Wot d'ye expect from a woman?" asked the disgusted cockney.

"I expect a lot from Elaine Holgate, Rake."

CHAPTER IX

CROSS SECTIONS

FAY paced the deck of the cabin with his brain swirling in the maze of the situation.

He darted a swift glance now and then at the rich curtains covering the sliding door, behind which lurked the two ex-detectives.

Their heavy breathing could be heard above the thrashing of the yacht's screws. They conversed in unguarded whispers. Their shuffling feet, moving from starboard to port and back again through the alleyway, reminded the cracksman of prison guards.

He held these two men in the contempt a professional holds for a brace of amateurs. His nimble brain cut through their presence. It soared to the Shrewsbury River and the waiting kicker-yacht. It enlisted Harry Raymond and the powers of the underworld. In fancy he saw his plans take substance and become a reality.

"Rake," he snapped, "I've decided!"

The cockney blinked and asked.

"Decided wot, Chester?"

"That we've got cards enough to win this game. That we can cop the gold—no matter how much it is—and get away with it. And we can do it alone."

"'Ow?"

"By playing Big Scar against Holgate. The yegg is going to search this ship until he finds the gold. It must be hidden here. I don't think it is in the boilers. But I do think it is aboard, and can be gotten."

"Wot would you do with it all if you found it?"

"Drop it overboard and mark the spot. We can get divers to lift it up when we want it. Do you remember the Selby Smelter job in 'Frisco?"

"Can't say that I do."

"That's the trouble with you, Rake. A good detective remembers practically all the crimes of record. A successful crook should make a mental note of everything big in the larceny line. It's an asset in a pinch."

"Wot about the Selby job?"

"A smelter employee tunneled under a building, removed a ton of gold, carried it out on a dock and threw it into the water. The police never suspected it was right under them. They searched every boat and fence. They were stumped, Rake! The hiding-place was too simple."

"Did they catch the fellow?"

"Yes, he squealed, but we won't! Suppose we find where this gold is? Suppose it is near a porthole? We'll dump it overboard, mark the spot with a fish-line and a bottle, and wait. I defy any man to find where we have hidden it. Water leaves no trace."

"The only flaw, Chester, is important. Whore's the bloomin' gold?"

Fay glanced at his watch. He listened and heard the anchor chain rattling through a hawser pipe. The Standart swung with the outcoming tide. The shadow of the Highlands lay across her port rail.

"The gold," said Fay, can be located by deduction. I want a cross-section drawing of this yacht. We'll probe every hold and cabin. Matter occupies space. Big Scar will help us. Then, when we

find the bullion, we'll plant it forever."

"Going to round on 'Arry?"

"Not exactly. Those crooks he has with him can't stand prosperity. I know them of old. They will get arrested spending money. Imagine Red Leary and Mike the Bike and Micky Gleason and little Jimmy Hope with a million gold each? They'd try to set New York afire. The stool-pigeons would turn them over to the police. You and I can handle money."

Rake emptied his pockets dolefully.

Fay laughed. "Oh, it's all right," he said. "Buck up! We're actually in a splendid position. We've got Holgate's secret. We have confederates at hand if we need them. We are conveniently forced to stay on a yacht which is as rich as a mint. And, Rake, we can escape at any time."

The cockney followed the cracksman's glance. It rested on the gilded ventilator, set in the ceiling.

"When do you go that way, Chester?"

"At two bells, to-night."

"'Ow about Yellow Top?"

"She'll be sleeping. One of the two ex-dicks will be off watch. The other, well, you know how they all are, Rake."

"It's a pipe, Chester. Where are you going?"

"I'll be back at sunup. I'm going with Big Scar."

Rake thrust his big hands into his pockets. He shook his head over a sudden thought.

"You better look out for the yegg, Chester. 'E may double-cross you. 'E wants you to put him straight on the place where the gold is located. Then, e's going to do hus 'arm when 'e finds where it is!"

"We'll work too swiftly. We'll prowl this yacht and make a getaway. I want to go through Holgate's papers as a last resort. There may be a clue there which will show the hiding-place of the gold. There is also the chance that he has correspondence from Frisbee which will help us wonderfully. Letters and a millionaire's secret, Rake, are assets."

"Looks good," said the cockney. "I only 'ope we succeed."

Fay threw himself on a divan and closed his eyes. He planned out each detail of the enterprise. The flaw in his reasoning was self-evident. He must first find the gold in order to obtain it—a trifle which was tantalizing.

He finished a late dinner, brought in by the same stupid-eyed steward who had served them on a former occasion. He saw the shadow of one of the ex-detectives move across the lights of the alleyway.

"That's Ed—Gumshoe Ed—the one wot pinched me," whispered the cockney after the steward had closed the door.

Fay did not question Rake. Intuition had told the English thief that his natural enemy was sniffing outside the cabin.

The cracksman went to a porthole. He watched the lights of the Highland colonies come twinkling visible. He marked the rise and fall of the yacht. He felt the tug at the anchor chain. A heavy swell was running with the tide.

Hours passed. Midnight, and eight bells, arrived. No word came to the cabin from Elaine or Big Scar. The deck, as seen through the portholes, seemed deserted. Bright light-points spangled the overhead void. A series of riding lamps, on the mast of a nearby tender, showed the position of the Glorianna.

Fay searched for a night-glass. He narrowed his eyes at the shadowy form of the sloop. He tried to piece together her construction. He decided, as one bell struck, that there was no chance for the bullion being aboard the racing yacht.

"The gold is here," he told Rake as he stamped the deck with his heel. "It's on this yacht. It's the only place to put it. I'll pump Big Scar dry when I meet him at two bells. He may be keeping something back."

The cockney assisted in removing the

ventilator grating by holding the table as Fay sprang on it and started unscrewing four flush screws with a pocket screwdriver taken from one of the grips.

"I don't think 'Arry is 'olding anything back," he whispered to Fay. "I know 'im too well. 'E's a great blow! Hif 'e knew where the swag is 'e'd tell hus. 'E wouldn't go ashore with you hif 'e knew."

"Keep quiet!" snapped Fay. "Let go the table and turn out the light. I can work in the dark, now. Remember, that door isn't locked."

Rake went to the switch and turned it. He glided across the deck and listened at the curtains. He heard an undernote that sounded like a walrus breathing. It was repeated.

Going back to the table and Fay, he said: "Gumshoe Ed is seven fathoms under."

"Sisst, I've got the grating off. Take it and lay it on the rug. Don't drop it. That's right, Rake. Now take the screwdriver. Here. Feel it?"

Fay bent, balanced himself, removed his coat and shoes and bundled them into a small package.

"I've got my gat," he said. "I've got money. I'm going up. You screw the ventilator plate in place. Remove all evidence that will show the way I got out. You may have an inspection before sunup. I'll be back by then, Rake. Goodbye."

The cracksman lifted an arm, rested his elbow over a ledge and wormed his way through a cone-shaped deck ventilator until his head and one shoulder were in the open. He glanced around. No one was on the boat deck. A lone anchor-watch huddled in the forepeak. A snore, followed by others, marked the position of Gumshoe Ed—who was keeping a dreamy vigil in the alleyway that led to the after cabin of the Standart.

"I didn't need to escape this way," Fay said as he lay across the deck and pulled on his coat. "I could have gone right by Gumshoe Ed."

He waited and listened. There was small chance of being discovered on the shadow-crossed boat deck of the yacht. The light from the stars and the riding lamps on the foremast shone pale. A single streamer of fire issued from the yacht's funnel. It died to a soft glow. A furnace door clanged beneath the deck.

Big Scar or the boat which should be waiting were not in evidence. Fay crawled to a low rail and stared over the stern of the yacht. He saw a painter hitched to the jackstaff. It tugged and jerked.

He turned his head at a sudden sound. A flare of yellow light struck over the deck between two cabins. A door softly closed. A shadow moved within a shadow.

Elaine stood by the rail. She had glided from her stateroom. Her suspicions were aroused. She turned, gazed directly towards Fay, then, not seeing him in the gloom, moved gracefully forward.

The cracksman cursed himself for being so soft. He heard the girl wake the sleeping ex-detective. She rated him soundly. Her voice rose above Gumshoe Ed's indignant protests that he had just snatched a small nap—that he could stand guard lying down.

Elaine came back to the rail. Her glance was on the misty outlines of the Glorianna and the tender that lay alongside the yacht. She breathed the night air in deep gulps, turned away from the rail, lifted her chin, eyed the exact position where Fay lay, then disappeared with her cabin light illuminating the rail and the sea for a brief interval.

Fay rose and tiptoed aft. He grasped his shoes, stood erect, swung his head and saw, dimly outlined, the hulking form of Big Scar coming beneath the yacht's bridge and dodging the ventilators on the windward side of the yacht.

Events moved swiftly and in complete silence. The big yegg, whose eyes were supersensitive, raised a hand to Fay. He

motioned for him to come off the cabin's deck.

Fay dropped alongside the crook and grasped his arm. Big Scar pointed to the painter and made a sign to descend. He pulled in the slack, waited until the small boat steadied, then repeated the sign as Fay hesitated.

The cracksman slung his shoes around his neck, grasped the taffrail, and slid down to the tossing boat. Big Scar followed. The boat was shoved away from the fantail of the yacht. It bobbed and tossed in the gloom. A stout pair of oars came out. The locks had been oiled. They gave forth no sound. The running tide aided. The white outlines of the Glorianna loomed within Fay's glance.

"Is anybody aboard her?" asked Fay.

"Sure. Keep quiet. See, there's a man standin' on the forepeak of the tender. Don't let him see you."

The two boats were left astern. Big Scar knew his course. He rowed steadily for fifteen minutes, drifted with the tide, backed water and swung the light craft into the reaching arms of a river.

"The Shrewsbury," he rumbled. "The Grace Darling ought to be near here. The boys will be expecting me. I signalled I'd be over to-night."

"How did you signal?"

"By hanging a red shirt out of a fo'cas'le porthole. It beats wireless!"

Fay gripped the gunwales and rose. He studied the dark shores of the river. Boathouses and the roofs of many mansions showed. A railroad train crimsoned the night with the sparks from a smokestack. It rumbled over a bridge.

"Good country to hide in," he said.

"The police are bad."

"They always are."

Big Scar feathered his oars. "Ain't we met somewhere before?" he asked.

"No. I've heard of you and you've heard of me. We kept the same company, but we didn't meet."

"Nollie Matches is a good hook, but he lacks push."

"I'd say the same thing, Scar. I use him for a valet. He's a good stall."

"D'ye know any of the mob on the Darling?"

"Dan the Dude said that Micky—no, Mike the Bike and Glycerine Jimmy were with you. I know them. They know me. We took a big jug in Montana together. Jimmy is very quick with the soup, Scar."

"I guess you're all right," muttered the satisfied yegg. "You're one of them kid-glove boys. .I don't know how you happened to get aboard the Standart. I don't care. All I wants to know is that you're not a stool-pigeon or a copper."

"Anything new about the gold?"

"Not yet. The mates are hostile. I got to be careful when I prowl around the yacht. I've about decided the gold is in the old man's cabin. It can't be anywhere else."

"You mean the captain's?"

"No! Holgate's. The old robber!"

"But is his cabin big enough?"

"Can't be any place else—unless it's in the girl's stateroom. I'll find out to-morrow. It must be in one of them two places."

"Have you a drawing or a blueprint of the Standart?"

"No. I can make one. I've been over her from keel to truck." The yegg raised an oar for silence. He listened, then continued: "There's the kicker-yacht there. See it? The one with the dinky on the deck?"

A cautious hail came over the water. Big Scar cupped his hands and answered it. He resumed rowing. The small boat glided alongside the kicker-yacht. Fay saw the name:

"Grace Darling—Sheepshead Bay."

"Up you go!" growled the yegg. "There's Mike the Bike. The one standin' lookin' at you."

Fay reached over a low rail and lifted himself to the deck of the half house-boat, half yacht.

"Hello, Mike," he said. "Remember

me? It was in Butte, Montana, when—"

Mike the Bike gripped the edge of the cabin door. He stared at Fay's form and face. He turned and shouted something into the cabin. Three men, in shirt-sleeves and with hard, straight brows, came out.

"It's Chester Fay!" said Mike, proudly. "Big Scar brought him. We're going to get the cush now! Chester always gets wot he goes after."

Fay took charge of the conference which was held around the table in the boathouse. He was recognized as the leader. He glanced from Big Scar to Mike the Bike and at the alert features of four crooks whom the big yegg had enlisted in the enterprise against Holgate's millions.

Glycerine Jimmy passed the glasses and a bottle. Drinks were drained to the absent Nolly. The millionaire was roundly cursed. The situation, from the viewpoint of the underworld, was thrashed out and detailed in tense argot.

"We're all in it," rumbled Big Scar. "The kale is aboard the steam yacht. It ain't on the sloop. The question before us is to locate where the old guy planted his swag. Then we'll get our hooks on it, split it—eight ways—and blow."

Fay pulled a folded slip of paper from his pocket and spread it out on the table.

"Come over here, Scar," he said. "Draw me a diagram of the Standart. Show the holds and the decks. If the gold is aboard that yacht we can locate it by elimination."

The yegg upended his drink, wiped his mouth, shot a cautious glance through the open cabin door, and moved to Fay's side.

He started drawing the Standart from memory. He paused now and then and chewed on the end of a badly-bitten lead-pencil. He glared for inspiration at the eager faces around him.

"Fo'cas'le and forehold," he explained. "Both frisked. I've been in the chain locker. I've been in the bilge. I've moved the cargo in the main hold—upper and lower. No go! I've been through the bunkers. I've looked as far aft as I can crawl. The gold isn't below the main deck. I'll swing if it is!"

"Finish the cabin drawings," suggested Fay.

Big Scar drew the galley house, the combined bridge, pilot house and chart room. He outlined the after cabins and marked off the occupants of each. "This is where the dame sleeps," he said. "This is her bathroom. This is the old guy's suite. This is the secretary's layout. Here's the guests' cabins—all kinda small. There's another cabin or two I ain't got. But it's the layout, and I've been through most ov it."

A disappointed snarl went around the circle of crooks. Fay rose and fingered the drawing.

"I'll keep this?" he asked. "There's only one big space you haven't accounted for."

"Wot's that?" asked Big Scar.

"The four boilers."

"Hell, the swag isn't in them!"

"It might be, Scar. If it isn't any place else it is there."

The yegg shelved his brows. He worked them up and down. His eyes closed in thought.

"Another thing," suggested Fay, "that strikes me as being peculiar about the matter of the gold—is how you got word of it in the first place. Who tipped you off to the fact that Holgate had ordered so much bullion moved from the Subtreasury to City Island?"

"I knew it was going to be moved a month ago, Chester."

"That long ago?"

"Sure."

"Who tipped it off?"

"Dan the Dude. He put me wise. Said word came up from Wall Street that there would be a big truck job for somebody. I got busy—saw a broker's clerk—and found out that Holgate had ordered twenty tons of gold for delivery at

a certain date. The clerk said the old guy was unloading Amalgamated Zinc and some other stocks and collecting gold certificates. The trucks were hired. Eight guards went with them."

Fay folded the drawing Big Scar had made and placed it in his pocket. He gripped the edge of the table. His keen face flushed slightly. He said as he swept the faces around the table:

"Boys, we've had a lot of peculiar information on this job. We worked separately and then came together. We better stay together. There are some things in the gold matter I don't understand. One, for instance, is troubling me right now. Nollie Matches and I stumbled on Holgate's secret. The old man pulled off something pretty raw, and we are the goats. We figured that this something he pulled off caused him to sell his stock and load the Standart with gold. The trouble is that the little thing we have on him took place about ten days ago. Now Big Scar says he had made preparations to move this gold thirty days ago. Then he didn't order the gold put on the Standart for a getaway, as Nollie and I figured. You know millionaires sometimes have to make getaways. Remember Boss Tweed and the Turner Brothers?"

Glycerine Jimmy nudged his nearest confederate.

"Old Holgate is a crook!" he declared. "Maybe he copped the gold on some phony paper that'll be pronounced forgeries."

"No!" snapped Fay. "The gold was obtained legitimately. The man is worth sixty million dollars. Let me outline the whole matter to you clearly."

"Go on, Chester," growled Big Scar.

"First, we have a multimillionaire, a most charming niece, a racing yacht and a pleasure yacht. The millionaire orders a number of tons of gold transferred from the Subtreasury to a shipyard at City Island. The gold is moved. It goes aboard the racing yacht. The yacht immediately puts out and moves alongside the pleasure yacht—for some reason."

"It stayed there all that night!" said Big Scar.

"That was time enough to transfer the gold to the Standart without anyone, save a few trusted guards, knowing where it went. Now it isn't on the racing sloop. There's no reason to keep it there."

"I frisked the yacht good."

"Then, Scar," continued Fay, "it is still on the Standart and we have got to locate it. I suggest you and I go back, right away, and prowl the cabins. We can take a day or two for that job. We can't get the gold until we locate it."

"We could kidnap the girl and make her squeal. We could scuttle the yacht, locate it ourselves, and send down divers. Jimmy, here, has done some deep-sea diving."

Fay struck the big yegg a hearty blow across his broad back.

"That's it! We'll scuttle the Standart without hurting the girl, and find out where the gold is hidden. It's a winner, Scar! Do you see it?"

"Sure. We'll sink 'er off the Highlands in about thirty fathoms of water. You and me and Nollie can open the sea cocks some night. She'll go down."

Fay whipped out his watch. He replaced it.

"We don't want her to go all the way down, Scar. Don't you see that's rough work? It will complicate matters, and we might lose out in the end. All we want to do is to let about five feet of black bilge water run over her engine-room plates. Then we'll raise the cry that she is sinking."

"Wot good will that do, Chester?"

"Where the heart is—there is the treasure. Holgate, or Elaine, will almost instantly reveal the hiding place of the gold. There will be confusion aboard. The millionaire will order the gold put into the small boats. I know him. He will think of money first. Then we can

show that the ship isn't in any danger. Things will calm down. But we will have the location of the plunder and can act accordingly."

"That's fine!" boomed the yegg. "I'm proud of you, Chester."

"There's one stipulation, Scar," said the cracksman as he moved toward the cabin door.

"Wot is it? Wait a minute till I finish this drink."

"The stipulation is this—everybody. I don't want the Standart's sea-cocks opened until after the second yacht race."

"Wot's that got to do with us?"

"A lot, Scar. We want to see America beat the British. Holgate's sloop can do it."

"She'll win hands down if she sails the way she did to-day," said the yegg, upending a glass of raw whisky.

"Then we won't disturb the Standart or the Glorianna until after the defender is decided. It'll only be a day or two."

The yegg wiped his mouth with the back of a hairy hand. He glared around the cabin.

"So long, fellows," he said. "Lay low and pretend to be fishin' till I come back. We're going to follow our kid-gloved friend. He seems to know his business."

TO BE CONTINUED.

THE TINKER

By ANDREW SOUTAR

Entered in the BLACK CAT *Short-Story Contest.*

THE gambling spirit was insinuated into the daily—and nightly—life of Last Chance by a master of the myriad subtleties and subterfuges of the poker game. The spirit wasn't forced in any way by the elemental methods which the old-time chroniclers of Nevada history preconceived as correct material for their rough-hewn settings. The male section of the population had its belt and pockets so full of dollar bills that there wasn't room for a revolver or a knife.

Whenever they foregathered they would begin by comparing views on the rise or fall of the dollar in exchange, or the potential value of real estate, and pass by easy stages to a criticism of Wall Street operations, the chances of the wheat crop, the outbreak of spiritualism, and the prospects of Nevada keeping in the limelight if celibacy were the first condition of theatrical greatness.

The origin of the town itself was as humble as a charity boy. There was no conference of specially selected nomenclators who might be expected to study the tastes and prejudices of the more conservative of the residents. The man who gave it the name of Last Chance was an Italian who, when the rush for the ore began, trundled a hot dog wagon over the broken country and pitched his camp at the foot of the hill beyond which the gold was supposed to be. In the veins of Picani, the dago, was the blood of the true skeptic who knows that in any rush the ore is generally to be found in the next state.

The long procession of hard and soft-knit men, each burdened with impedimenta that would have broken the spirit of a well-bred mule, had to pass Picani's wagon on its way up the mountain side. The men who had exercised tact and forethought in the packing of their kit had no time to waste on him and his goods; others were attracted by the huge sign which spanned the truck and on which Picani had crudely lettered the warning: "The last chance." There was little in the way of food on the wagon, but jack-knives, string, nails, wire, and biscuits as edible as cement, are more valuable than platinum in given circumstances.

When the country beyond the mountain ridge was declared to be barren of everything save forlorn hopes, someone, brooding in suicidal silence, found a yellow pebble in the stream flowing through the valley to the east of Picani's wagon.

Within twelve months the valley was a town of roughly fashioned huts. Picani had migrated from the foot of the hill to a more central site, and the wagon had yielded place to a restaurant with steamed windows and appetizing smells that were concocted with the cunning of an alchemist. In those first twelve months Picani made sufficient money to bring his beloved Florence across the Atlantic to meet him; he sold out his business to Henri, the French Canadian, who had come down from Montreal. And in this story (as in the township) Henri must stand as the more imposing of the two personalities.

Henri was an artist in flattery and cajolery. The patrons called him "Onri"

—that was a concession to their vanity and protestations that they didn't spring from the old illiterate stock of mining thugs, but were approaching this new life with a certain refinement behind them.

The stories of "pockets" and "veins" discovered in the Last Chance valley never excited the semblance of envy in Henri; always he was one of the first to congratulate the lucky finder, or "combine," and his advice in the direction of thrift and investments was delivered sagely and with paternal solicitude.

Two years passed before the real development of Last Chance began. Fortunes had been made and lavishly advertised; the slopes of the valley were so crowded with huts and bungalows that a grasshopper couldn't have found a resting place. Most of the more ornate of the bungalows belonged to Henri; and they were rented by him at prices that would have soothed the conscience of a New York real estate agent.

Although Henri never soiled his hands with a pick or a blasting iron, he got more gold out of Last Chance valley than the majority of those who did. And when he had amassed the bankroll that he deemed sufficient for his immediate purpose he cleared the table, as it were, and began operations in dead earnest.

There was enough money in Last Chance to found every conceivable institution of vice, but Henri was concerned with only one whereto the others might flow like tributaries. He built the most imposing establishment in the valley, having whetted the appetite of everybody and everything, from the richest prospector to the loneliest stray dog, by stories, in advance, of the sumptuousness to which the hotel would aspire.

No one questioned his financial ability to bring these things to pass and, if they noted that he sold most of his outlying property to further the greater scheme, they agreed that he knew what he was about.

And so, in the fullness of time, the Last Chance Hotel became a reality, and the opening ceremony was a fete that overshadowed everything within the memory of the oldest among the populace. On that night Henri was magnificent in his personal embellishment. To the romantically inclined he suggested a chevalier from the pages of Dumas in his best and most adjectival mood. In years Henri was probably forty-five, but he was as a rook in experience. The complexion was rather sallow, but the brilliancy of the eyes lit up the whole of the handsome face. The sweep of dark eyebrow was as picturesque as anything devised for a theatre poster; the moustachios were as pointed as the wit of an Irish lawyer holding the losing end of an action for criminal libel.

Whatever the more conjectural of the population might think, Henri had no intention of waiting years for the wiping out of the capital expenditure. There were several fortunes hidden in the rude shacks and bungalows of Last Chance, and he was in hot pursuit of them.

"I have de ambitions," said Henri, at the opening dinner, "to make ze hotel a home from de home."

Which was very honest of him, since he must have figured it out that the majority of them wouldn't have any other home by the time he was finished with them.

Within a week after the opening ceremony the Last Chance Hotel had taken to itself the qualities of a lodestone. The multicolored fairy lights that were strung from casement to casement and shrub to shrub called with the irresistible lure of sirens; there was soft, inviting music floating up from the foliage, and white-uniformed coons shuffled, rhythmically, along the garden paths and over the velvet lawns.

The first untoward incident to disturb the comparative serenity of the town was the death, by shooting, of Lew Blackstone, reputed to be the wealthiest resident and known to be a gambler who

had been well schooled in Alaska. It was his own finger that pulled the trigger of the revolver, and at the inquiry, which was painfully informal, the suggestion was put forward that he had some secret sorrow which no man might share. Not one word was said about Henri's exploit of bluffing him out of a twenty thousand dollar jack-pot while holding only the king high.

Following the death of Blackstone, Henri himself had a run of bad luck, but nobody appeared to attach any significance to the fact that the winners were four or five comparative strangers who had taken up quarters in the hotel and were frequently to be seen in Henri's company of a morning when men saunter abroad to find in the clear air a tonic for the sultriness of the night before.

Meldrake, who had been a booking agent on a suburban railroad before joining in the rush to Last Chance, provided a piece of sound melodrama by raising a friend of Henri to thirty thousand dollars, producing a full house when called, and bursting into hysterical tears when he found himself up against four aces. Before Henri could get in his usual condolence, Meldrake—he was only a boy of twenty-two—rushed out into the main street and killed himself.

As in the case of Blackstone, the inquiry was rushed through. Nevertheless, the shadow of suspicion began to settle on the establishment, or, rather, men showed disinclination to accept Henri's invitations to that little back parlor of his where the sport of men of the world was indulged. A few weeks of perfect tranquillity settled the nerves, and then, with the move of a master, Henri introduced another phase of life.

A large hall in the hotel was fitted up as a theatre, and Henri arranged for the visit of a stock company of actors and actresses, whose chief qualifications were physical rather than mental. The shows became debauches. The theatre became a cabaret, and a pretty torrid one at that. But the young men of the town were more than satisfied. The women, who belonged to the oldest profession in the world, drained the youngsters of all the ready money they possessed, then passed them on to the card room, where Henri and his friends divested them of any securities they might hold.

The town of Last Chance began to feel the effect of this rapid living, but, instead of pulling itself together and making a fresh start, it gave way to indifference.

And then Henri introduced the missionary.

No one knew whence he came, who had recommended him, or what good he hoped to achieve, but Henri received the credit for making an attempt to bring the town to its senses, for it became known that he had guaranteed the salary and was intending to build a hall in which the missionary might hold his services.

Mr. Gilead arrived in the town on the night that Patrick O'Hagan was celebrating, in the same breath, as it were, the discovery of a new "pocket" and the birth of a saint. There had been no mining done for weeks past; everybody was given over to debauchery. The streets were redolent of garbage and dust, and only the hotel with its flaring lights seemed to be unaware of the degradation to which the town had sunk. From the theatre hall, where a burlesque was staged, came peals of raucous laughter; members of the audience danced among the chairs with members of the chorus; bottles and heads were cracked. Hop fiends and ether sniffers wallowed like stupified hogs in the shadows of the huts and in the very grounds of the hotel. Patrick O'Hagan, at the head of a dissolute band that would be loyal until his last dollar was gone, slouched through the town demanding to be told why his grandfather hadn't been crowned king of Ireland. The night sky was dark as though the stars shrank in horror; the

reflections in the river that flowed silently through the valley were of ghosts that seemed to be awaiting a cataclysm that might expunge the town from the face of the landscape. In the back parlor of the hotel, where the money spiders toiled, Henri and a few of the chosen were wheedling the money from a couple of gray-headed men, each of whom nursed a Magdalen in the hope that the luck would change.

Henri, acting on the signal from one of the Magdalens, was preparing to scoop in a substantial pot when the cacophony in the theatre hall came to a sudden stop. The card players looked up in wonderment. Clearly, to their ears, came a deep, sonorous voice raised in reproach, in scorn, in contumely:

"Fools! Sycophants! God forgive you! God help you, for you have fallen lower than the beasts of the field. Have done with your orgies. Get out into the open. Get back to toil and endeavor. In the streets your children are seeking comfort from the companionship of dogs. . . ."

Henri dropped his hand, and the other players followed him into the theatre hall.

Mr. Gilead was on the stage, which was empty of actors and actresses (they were staring from the body of the hall, where they were sitting and lying with the abandon of bacchanalians at a feast of Nero's time). The atmosphere was heavy with the smoke of cigars, tables were drenched with the wine that had been spilt; flowers hung limp and dead from the rafters. But through the haze the big eyes of the missionary shone with supernatural light. He was tall and thin and pallid. He was young. Every nerve in his body was straining with indignation as he stared down at the polyglot crowd.

They were awed by the sudden appearance of this apparition. When Henri made his appearance, a gasp of relief burst from them.

Slowly Henri walked up to the stage, his brows lowered, his lips set grimly.

"Say me," he began. "Who in hell are you?"

Mr. Gilead returned the stare.

"If I were Satan," he replied, "I could not have arrived at a more opportune moment. Are you the man they call 'Henri'?"

"You bet I am," said Henri, and snapped his teeth like a pike. "And this is my hotel. Savvy?"

"Then assist me to clear the place of this rabble," said the young man, "lest your soul perish with theirs."

The boy was sincere, even if he was inexperienced in the ways of sinners.

Henri fetched a deep breath, then he turned to the gaping crowd and laughed immoderately.

"Hear him," he cried. "'Rabble,' he say. You are rabble, pigs, dogs, cattle. And I pay his salary. *Mais si,* it is true. I, Henri, send for him, and say I will feed him and give him house for the meetings. Oh, la, la. Hear him. 'Rabble'!" And, stooping quickly, Henri picked up a glassful of wine from a near table, strode forward, and flung the contents in the face of the missionary.

That was all the lead which the painted crowd required. In unison, they yelled derisively, swooped forward, and hurled, not glasses, but bottles and everything on which they could lay their hands. Someone fired a revolver shot at the roof; someone turned out the lights. There was shrieking and yelling and smashing of chairs. They clambered on the stage and shouted for lights. It was Henri himself who found the switch and flooded the hall again with light. The missionary had fled, and the pursuit had begun. Here was finer sport than all the dancing and drinking. Man-hunting! Through the streets the people rushed, and far ahead of them sped Mr. Gilead.

From out of the blackness of the southern slope a dazed drunk of the night before rose to cut off the fleeing man's

retreat. The pursuers were given a vivid silhouette for a second or two. They saw a heavy stick whirl around a head, then came a scream of pain. They hurried on, giving tongue like hounds. Mr. Gilead doubled in his tracks and came back through the main street, heading, so it seemed, for the hotel. He came into the light of the fairy lamps that were strung from the casements, and the blood on his brow and cheeks showed like black smears, as though fingers, dipped in tar, had been trailed across his face. He doubled again and sought refuge in a shack less than a hundred yards from the hotel. The leaders of the mob hurled themselves against the door a second after the bolts were shot home.

"Burn him out," someone yelled.

It was Henri who intervened before the suggestion could be acted upon. He fought his way to the front and, standing with his back to the door, waved them to silence.

"A'right," he called out. "We got him. Leave him till morning. Money is much stronger than your weapons. I have much money. You see how I handle him. No food, no meats. *Rien.* Then we pack him off. Ha, I laugh when I t'ink of de new game, to-morrow."

The door was opened, slowly.

"Look out," a man yelled. "Here he is again. Now, get him."

But it was a woman who looked out at the mass of shrunken souls, a pale-faced woman with a child held tightly in her arms. There was no appeal in her eyes as she faced them, only contempt that was even greater than that which had looked from her husband's eyes when he faced them on the stage. They backed away, a strange, uncanny mass of bedaubed faces, low-cut gowns, bedraggled dress suits, leering faces, blinking eyes, sagging knees; they moved, lurched backward toward the hotel, and Henri, with his arms outstretched as though he would prevent anyone from breaking forward again, moved with them. They poured through the open doorway of the hotel like sheep pouring into the hurdled pen, the dog behind them. The door was closed. The white-faced woman, standing on the threshold of the shack, a hundred yards away, remained motionless until the last of the roisterers had been swallowed up; then she closed the door and went into the darkness where her man lay bleeding.

The riotous dancing was resumed in the theatre hall; in the quiet of the parlor Henri gathered up the pack of cards and gave them a vicious shuffle, so vicious that he might have been squeezing the life out of the audacious missionary who had dared to preach when he had been hired to play.

"To-morrow," he said, winking at one of the gray-haired men who was patting the fat hand of a woman seated on the arm-rest of his chair, "I shall make him crawl here on his knees. Shall I whip him with my hands? *Non.* I t'ink and t'ink out a plan to-night. To-morrow, perhaps, someone will come along and say me, 'Look, Henri, if you pay me—' "

A new sound had broken into the calm of the parlor, although the rowdyism in the adjacent hall was louder than ever. Henri rose from his chair and drawing aside the curtains looked out into the grounds. The others came behind him and looked over his shoulder.

The main street ran past the window, and coming along with a lazy swing was the craziest looking tinker that had ever been seen in those parts. He was leading a fat, contented mule, and the mule was drawing after it a swaying, creaking wagon that was laden to the point of collapse with every conceivable utensil that may be wrought of tin—baking tins and toasting jacks, buckets, sieves and paper baskets, wire mattresses, hip baths, trays, pots and pans and kettles; wire flower baskets hung from the sides of the wagon, even the shafts had been stabbed with hooks from which something might swing.

The tinker himself might have just returned from some revels of his own, for his hair was disheveled, and the night wind blew his tattered, wispy whiskers back over his shoulders and unmasked the raggedness of his neckwear.

He was singing, too, keeping time with a willow wand that served as a baton. He halted in front of the hotel; he wanted stabling for the night, and he was ready to pay for it; the lights hanging on the façade of the hotel seemed to focus on the wad of notes that the old fellow pulled from his dirty shirt.

"We don't want him here," growled one of the gray-haired gamblers. "This ain't a doss house; it's a hotel for gen'lemen. Give him an earful, Onri."

"Non, mon ami," said Henri, with a wicked grin, "let him stay. I told you, did I not, that we should have some fun to-morrow. Oh, I have a pretty wit, I tell you." He called from the window as the tinker came back out of the yard after seeing the mule stabled for the night, and the tinker, arching his eyebrows, slouched toward the window.

"Where from?" asked Henri, leaning far out.

The tinker's face was a mass of crinkles when he smiled, and he smiled his broadest as he looked up at Henri.

"From the 'dry' land, bo," said the tinker and laughed, uproariously. "Is this the town they call Last Chance?"

"You bet," said Henri.

"An' you got a couch for the 'ol' man to-night—eh, bo?"

"Mebbe, we can stake you for the night," said one of the gray-haired men, "that is if you can manage to get a wash somewheres."

"Now, look here, son," said the tinker, smiling at the painted women who were crowding to the window, "don't you try to put one over on a man old enough to be your gran'father. Away back yonder"—he jerked his willow in the direction whence he had come—"they said to me: 'Get along to Last Chance, and take Jinny, the mool wid yer; they're kinda sweet on strangers an' they've money to burn.'" He reached up and rested his hands on the window sill. "Look out," he said, "I'm coming' in." And before they could prevent him he had drawn himself up level with the open window; another second and he was in the parlor, bringing with him a shower of alkali dust that made the two women cough and choke.

"Purty dears!" said the tinker, soothingly, "but if yer can't stand that I reckon you'd better vamoose, cos I'm gwine to put on a pipe of baccy in a minute, and lord almighty how it do stink."

Henri was already tired of the joke.

"I'll get one of the servants to make you up de bed in de loft," he said, "and in de morning we shall have much to say to me and you. Savvy?"

But the tinker had settled himself in an easy chair at the table, and his eyes were smiling at the scattered cards.

"Say, bo," he said, "this ain't a poker joint, is it? Cos if it is, deal me a hand, and I reckon I'll show you guys just how the ol' game oughta be played. I 'members a town, away back—"

"See here," began Henri, but he stopped short as the tinker produced his wad and began to count out some bills preparatory to gambling.

"Mendin' holes in things what's broken is my trade," said the tinker without raising his eyes from the counting of the bills.

"And trade is good—eh?" Henri's voice had changed in tone. He sat down at the table and the others followed his example. "Well, if you like a game, and know how—"

"Thing is," broke in the tinker, "do you pay if you lose?"

Henri placed a wad on the table beside his elbow; it was sufficiently convincing a reply. The others followed his example, and two or three of Henri's professional friends, coming in from the theatre hall, sat down to watch. They

gathered from the wink that was passed along that the tinker had probably robbed someone of his pocket book, and it was time that someone rendered a similar service to him.

"Never knew the man who could beat me at the game," said the tinker, a touch of conceit in his voice, "an' ol' Jinny, she's that patient she'll go to sleep in a blizzerd jest so long as she knows the ol' man has the luck with him. . . . Who opened this jack-pot?"

"I did," said Henri, and looked at the tinker's wad as though it fascinated him. "I opened it for a t'ousand bucks."

"A t'ousand bucks. Eh?" The tinker was impressed, and his mimicking of Henri's accent was almost natural in the circumstances. "Some gambler, bo."

"You vill play? You come in?"

"I'll say I do," laughed the tinker, "but I'm straddling, bo, an' it'll cost you an' the other guys another t'ousand to come in along o' me."

They went in—two thousand dollars each; Henri, having three aces, drew two cards; the tinker took four, having one king. Henri opened the betting, and was ably backed by his friends who had been flashed a sight of the three aces. The tinker hummed as he made his bets, and never blinked an eyelid when Henri jumped a thousand dollars a time, there being no limit.

It was Henri who lost his nerve, and he called the tinker at eight thousand.

"Four kings," said the tinker, and reached for the pot.

"I reckon Jinny could do wi' a rest, bo," said the tinker, as he dealt the cards, "an' I shouldn't be mighty surprised if there was a sight of work for a tinker in these parts. . . . Let's make it an ace pot and put some pep into the bettin'. . . ."

The story that a hobo as frowsy as a decaying mushroom was teaching the great Henri how to put pep into poker spread to the other room, and men and women crowded in to watch the entertainment. The tinker wasn't perturbed. He played his hands with assurance that tore the very heart strings of Henri and his friends and he was never so carried away by his good luck as to stop his flow of good-humored badinage. He never made a mistake, and his bluff was so perfect as to strike fear into the hearts of the others. Dawn came to find the party still absorbed. The tinker had cleaned up all the ready cash available until the bank should open, and nothing could induce him to accept checks.

They provided him with the best suite of rooms in the hotel—he, the alkali-dusted hobo who would have been content with a bed in the stable loft, a bale of hay for a pillow and a horse rug for an eiderdown.

He slept throughout the day, and in the cool of the evening, just before dinner, he led Jinny, the mule, out of the yard and rode her, bareback, around the town, "just to stretch his muscles," as he said. They said, afterward, those who had followed him in open-mouthed wonder, that he spoke to only one person during that ride, and she was the wife of the missionary who had been mobbed by the populace because he had dared to upbraid them.

There was no demand for music or song that night—the lure of the gaming table was too strong. To accommodate the crowd that wished to look on and play, the game was transferred to the theatre hall. Again, the tinker won. His luck alarmed them but didn't frighten them out of the game; indeed, everybody was anxious to turn the tide against him and share the pile that was growing at his dirty elbow.

Then came the end of the tolerance. Stephansson, who had lost the savings of two years, boldly declared the tinker to be a swindler.

"Look at the hands yer get dealt yer," said Stephansson, "an' then look at the hands yer deal yerself."

"A'right, bo," said the tinker with a

smile, "jest you deal the cards for me, and hold my hand, lettin' me have a peek at it; then I'll play it, but I don't touch 'em. . . . Now, let her go."

And the result was the same. The tinker could read faces; he seemed to know exactly where the cards lay. At midnight Henri and one of his friends were the only others in the game, and the tinker had increased his fortune to such an extent that half the town of Last Chance was his.

"I reckon we make to quit now," said Henri, suddenly, and in a peculiarly modulated voice. "Luck is dead out."

"I t'ought youse was poker guys," said the tinker, and laughed, banteringly. "How much do youse reckon I've won?"

Nobody answered for a moment. Then Henri said:

"I got the hotel left."

"What's she worth?" asked the tinker.

"Quarter-million," said Henri, ignoring the winking of his friends and staring hard at the fires that showed in the eyes of the tinker.

"Do we play?" The tinker's voice was compelling.

There followed a period of silence. The harsh laugh of a hysterical woman broke into it like the crash of crockery in a drawing room.

"God! He's got th' luck of th' devil—ain't he?" she cried.

"Yep," said the tinker, slowly turning in his chair to look at her. "I reckon I 'ave. . . . Do we play?"

"Yes," said Henri, and his cheeks were bloodless.

"Got any papers?" asked the tinker, with suspicion in his voice. "If this is a square deal, put th' papers on th' table."

"Go on, Henri," urged one of the friends. "Don't let a hobo beat you to it. His luck's bound to turn. All or nothin'—that's gamblin'."

It was done, and within ten minutes the hotel had passed into the hands of the tinker. He rose from his chair and looked at the crowd.

"If there's any guy here who thinks he hasn't had a square deal," he said, "now's his chance to speak a piece."

One of the professional assistants of Henri moved a hand to his hip pocket; the tinker marked the movement, and, without showing signs of being flurried by the action, said quietly to Henri:

"Jes' give yer friends the hint to clear out before I has to call on my friends to start the shootin' up."

Instinctively, the eyes of the company lifted to the windows of the hall, and for the first time they saw suspicious movements behind the curtains.

Henri, strangely subdued and submissive, signaled to his friends to make their way out of the hotel. The tinker stopped them as they were moving in procession.

"Ladies an' gen'lemen," he said, in a sing-song voice, "I guess you've never seen poker played same as we played it 'ere. No, an' you'll never see it played ag'in. Funny how luck sticks to some men—ain't it? Here was I, a tinker, a mender of broken things; here am I, boss of this caboodle. Mebbe youse heard of Straight Flush Sam? (They glanced, nervously at each other, for the exploits of the gentleman named had become history). Youse have. He cleaned up many a joint where they fancied they was wise. Well—"

They waited, hungrily, upon his further words.

"Well, I ain't Sam. I'm lookin for that same Sam, an' I'm goin' to play him all the poker he wants to play—play it good an' hard, so's Sam'll take to another job. There's a hole in Sam, and it wants mendin'. And, look 'ere, there's a mighty big hole in this town. I been taking a peek at that river o' yourn, an' you take it from me that if yer don't slip yerselves an' build a dam away back yonder behind the ridge, youse gwine to have more water in this town than youse know what to do with. You ain't got much money left—I seen to that—but there's mighty few o' yer as cannot

handle a pick an' shovel. Now, git. This 'ere saloon is closed, siney die, as the lawyers say, an' I'm gwine to open it, on my own, inside a week."

The curtains seemed to move, threateningly, but, perhaps, it was only the night wind. Everybody left—everybody save Henri, who remained seated at the table, the tinker standing beside him.

Strangely enough, they all went back to work on the following day; a committee went over the ridge to inspect the river, and another committee discussed the advisability of sending east for a surveyor.

At the end of a week—in that time they had seen nothing of the tinker or Henri—there was a general summons to the Last Chance Hotel. It was to be reopened to the public. When they arrived there, they found old Jinny, the mule, hitched to the wagon, and standing in the drive; the wagon was laden with its amazing collection of pots and pans and wire baskets, and the wind was blowing a refrain through it.

Inside the hotel, a wonderful metamorphosis had taken place. All the garish embellishment had been stripped away; the elaborately decorated dining-room was denuded of its papier-mâché palms, and the seductive tables *a deux,* hidden in the corners, were replaced by benches on trestles.

"My idea," said the tinker, as he marked the gaze of the crowd, "is to make this 'ere hall a general eatin' place. Ye'll get yer tickets at the office as yer come in, an' the harder ye've worked in the valley the more ye'll get to eat. I figure it that we can supply the eats at half the price ye'd pay for 'em back in the city, an' if yer don't have the moosic to play the grub down yer tummies—waal, I don't suppose yer tummies will kick. An' them as hasn't got decent accommydation in their shacks 'll find that we have some nice, clean, homey beds to let at a couple o' dollars a week."

He escorted them around the hotel so that they might observe the changes that had taken place, and they were so amazed by what they saw and heard that they hadn't the wit to inquire how it had been done. It was when they reached the theatre hall that they felt a presence which they couldn't define. True, the pulpit, on the stage, had been improvised from boxes, and the choir stalls were of rough deal and pine. In the body of the hall were benches where the congregation might sit, not in comfort, but in homage. And awaiting them on the stage, his right hand resting on the crudely fashioned pulpit, was Mr. Gilead, the missionary, whom they had pursued through the streets of Last Chance. The tinker bowed to him; then, turning, he said to the crowd:

"We're making a fresh start in this 'ere town, and this gen'leman, Mr. Gilead, happens to be my deputy. He's goin' to run the place, and I reckon he'll run it well." He touched Henri on the shoulder. "Now, Henri," he said, pleasantly, "we'll say our good-byes and hit the trail."

They followed the pair to the drive, where Jinny was patiently awaiting her master. The two men climbed on the shafts of the crazy looking wagon which rocked and swayed beneath their weight. The tinker gathered up the reins, "clucked" his tongue, and waved his willow wand in token of farewell. Henri stared, moodily, ahead. He knew that he was being taken away for the town's good.

"I reckon we'll trail old Sam," said the tinker; "that's another pot that wants mendin'. . . . Now, Jinny, old girl."

The old, fat mule gave a heave, and with a squeak and rattle the wagon lurched forward.

From inside the hotel came the sound of music—music of the organ which had been purchased for the motion picture entertainments — entertainments which had been held up owing to the non-arrival of films.

NO WAY BUT THIS

By JENNIE HARRIS OLIVER

Entered in the BLACK CAT *Short Story Contest*

JOHN VANCAMP, Junior, stood loosely buttoned in his little blue denims. He posed in a flood of sunshine, where the breeze from two doors and two windows lifted his yellow hair, swirling it upward like pale flame. Whimsical lights played in the hazel warmth of his long-lashed eyes. His white skin glowed. His rosy lips curved. Suddenly he gave a mad leap and began prancing around and around, his barefoot sandals clipping on the polished floor.

Rosy Sunpie, the VanCamp's yellow maid, showed her perfect teeth. "Heah that child, Miss Roxey," she lilted, "he's gone plump hijuberous!"

Junior's young mother left the early roses she was arranging on the sideboard and looked into her sewing-room. "Why such cavortings, sonny?" she asked, gaily. "Oh," she laughed, looking beyond the boy, "who's this I see?"

Junior paused, one sandaled foot lifted. "I found her, Roxey," he informed his mother, coolly. "She's mine."

Mrs. VanCamp looked at the mite of a girl her son had "found," and her eyes warmed with the protective tenderness everyone's did when they saw Emmett Ayler's baby daughter, Hepsibah. Where did you find her?" She was suddenly anxious.

"Down there," Junior pointed, "in the lane."

Hepsibah had been following the boy's every motion. Now she put one finger in her mouth and looked up at Mrs. VanCamp. Her hair, a dusk cloud of silky curls, was tangled; earth-stains were on the front of her blue, embroidered frock. One silk stocking was down, showing a scratch on the rose-leaf skin.

Suddenly Ayler, himself, appeared in the doorway. Roxey swung around, startled, though she smiled reassuringly. "The runaway's here, Emmett. Jackie found her in the lane."

Ayler hunted his handkerchief and wiped his hot face. "Must 'a' crawled under the gate," he panted. "Shore makes yuh feel queer the first time they do hit." He held out his hand to Hepsibah.

"Let's go, baby."

Hepsibah paid no attention. She was looking at Junior with soft, puzzled eyes. Why didn't he laugh, and prance? Suddenly the boy strutted over, braced himself and scowled up in Ayler's face.

"Is *she*," he pointed at Hepsibah, *"yours?"*

Ayler laughed. "Of course she is. Whose did yuh suppose?"

"Mine," Junior nodded, promptly; "but I don't want her. Take her away."

Roxey listened, shocked. "Don't pay any attention to him, Emmett," she said, stooping to kiss Hepsibah. "I'm going to spank him. I won't have him impudent!"

"He's just mad because I come after Hepsy. Shore was scared Liz would git in before I could find her. She don't know a thing about hit. Don't yuh worry, Roxey—what *he* said. Jest a child!"

Emmett lifted his daughter to his shoulder and dipped away under the peach trees toward the lane. But Hep-

sibah craned her little neck for a last look. She didn't want to go.

EMMETT usually talked things over with Liz, but he failed to mention Jackie VanCamp's repudiation of the Aylers. That she learned for herself. It seemed the boy had to follow up his chance to be cruel. He hated Ayler, always referring to him as the "bad man." Hating him, he hated Hepsibah.

Liz was setting a fringe of cannas against the wall of her new home the day the young vandal came down the lane to play outside the gate. She saw Hepsibah run and tuck her little face between the pickets; saw Jackie turn his small, insulting back and walk away. Hepsibah screamed after him—screamed, and wrung her mites of hands, like a woman. When Liz picked her up she sobbed, her fingers still clutching each other.

"Sweetheart," the mother said, soft and comforting. "Listen—listen to mother!"

Instantly Hepsibah was still, though she shook with inward grief. "Do you remember," Liz said, "when the big man hurt you so you could see mother, that you were a brave girl and didn't cry?"

Hepsibah nodded against her mother's shoulder.

"If you *had* cried, the man couldn't have made you see. If you cry now, you will have to wear a cloth over your eyes again. Let the boy go—he is just a boy. Don't play with him, ever again. If he speaks to you, turn your back on him. Will you—to please mother?"

Hepsibah was only four, but it was a part of her to listen and mind. When she nodded again, Liz was satisfied. She knew the child would keep her word.

IT came to be the talk on Bear Creek how Hepsibah Ayler and Jack VanCamp hated each other.

Back in the common school grades, children told how Hepsibah wouldn't sit near Jack, and how Jack wouldn't march next to Hepsibah. High-school pupils laughed about the "play party" out in the "sticks," where these young enemies had queered the game by refusing to pay the kissing forfeit; of the way they had paired the two off at a banquet and spied on them stalking silently home, Jack on one side of the street and Hepsibah on the other; of the time Jack had voted for the homeliest girl on the campus, when one vote would have cast Hepsibah as the prettiest. It was even in the high school "Annual" how Hepsibah walked four miles through sand rather than ride in the same car with Jack VanCamp.

All this was crude—not nearly so potent as the unexplainable methods of animosity that came later. Bear Creek folks, seeing the two gaze icily past each other in the post office, at church and entertainments, in all the walks and drives up and down the "Bottoms," tried to figure it out. Some dug up a feud between Jack's mother and Hepsibah's father; others thought that VanCamp was still "wrothy" over the year Emmett set a supposed headless horse to queer his gin crew. As to the high-handed crisis that came to pass when the girl was nineteen and the boy twenty-one, no one ever did pretend to fathom that.

Of course, such enmity is neither youthful nor natural, and no one can go on hating year after year without being, in some way, marred. Fight showed in the lift of Hepsibah's little head, in the insolence of her small mouth—proud, *too* proud, some said, "for who she was." Hepsibah was a beauty, when it came to that—not big and bloomy, given to crisp, snowy trappings like her mother; but slim and gossamer fine, silken and ineffably fragrant.

It is impossible to describe Hepsibah and do her justice, there was so much *just her*. She was of medium height. Her forehead was wide, and her little face ovaled down to a sweet chin, dim-

pled, yet brave. The eyes that had been blind, still held a purple mystery different from other eyes, and her cloudy hair was always "just so." It goes without saying that slender feet, always finely shod, should be exquisite, but it was her hands that people noticed most.

If, as has been said, the hand is an outpost of the real self, then the daughter of Ayler must have inherited the aristocrat from somewhere. Emmett's hands were narrow and loose, the mother's big and capable. Hepsibah's hands were small and firm, pearly-white and pointed. Her luster was set off by shades to match her eyes—blues and purple-blues.

Liz and Emmett went clear to Kansas City for clothes—sheer lawns, cool linens, shimmery silks. They haunted the shops for drooping hats that were wide, but not too wide. They bought silk stockings by the box. When it came to underwear, nothing there was fine enough. All the Ayler women and all the Elly women, must embroider and tat, crochet and French-knot, shadow-lace and knit, with untiring devotion.

With all this, it is strange that Hepsibah cared more for books than for clothes. She made better grades than Jack VanCamp, and that is saying a great deal. Liz and Emmett gloated over the grades, though they never made open comparisons. They never spoke of Jack VanCamp at all.

On the other side, the VanCamps took pride in Hepsibah. They reminded Jack that he ought at least to be a gentleman. They even impressed upon him how the girl's father had been brave enough to risk his life for a VanCamp. There had come to be warm affection between Roxey and Liz, and since Emmett had built down the lane where one must pass in going anywhere, at all, it would have been a comfort to visit back and forth. Still, it is next to impossible to exchange lace patterns where two young stiff-necks have relegated each other to the scrap heap.

Back a few years, Ayler had liked to run "the gin-stands" for VanCamp. He was a splendid hand. Now he didn't even market his crop of cotton there. Take it one season with another, though, the feud fell hardest on the VanCamps. Hepsibah was still, and cool and inscutable; but the fire always smouldering in the boy, broke out at the least provocation, running him wild. And his parents had builded around Jack. For that matter, everyone in the house lived in him. Mrs. Malone, the grandmother, listened for his step; the maid cooked just what "Misteh Jack" liked best, and spent countless hours laundering his white summer suits.

It had been a sacrifice, urging college on the boy, but that way out, was thought of. Jack himself decided against a four-year course. He went over to Stillwater for awhile and came back with advanced ideas on cotton raising, but that was all. He chose the cotton business. He liked Bear Creek and everything up and down it, everything, that is, but the Aylers—*Hepsibah* Ayler! He could have ignored Emmett; but when he came face to face with the girl, a demon within him arose.

"I don't want him around the gin in that mood," VanCamp once said to Roxey. "He's liable to get a hand yanked off. I sent him to town for bagging to-day, just to keep something from happening."

"Of course," Roxey murmured, "it was Hepsibah."

"Of course—such a fool thing! We found a glove in the road"—VanCamp frowned—"Hepsibah's. When she turned back, she held the mate in her hand. Jack had picked up the glove, but when he saw whose it was, he threw it back in the dirt. They looked like two young tigers about to claw each other."

"Well," urged Roxed, miserably.

"Hepsibah wouldn't touch the glove—I suppose after he had. She just left it lying in the sand—a two-dollar glove!"

Really, Jack VanCamp had no thought of crippling himself. He loved life so well it seemed he must live forever. That was proven by the habits he formed, or didn't form. One thing, he didn't drink a drop, in a community where other boys drank much. He told his mother about his one fling at "boozing."

"All through high school," he confessed, "I was possessed to know how it would be to get blind, staving drunk, and when the seniors had a spread, I decided to pour down everything in sight—and did. They got me to sing, and I must have raised the roof. When the jolt came, I was standing up, waving a mug and roaring:

"'Life was only made for laughter,
What—what though tears come after?'

Then I fell among the dishes. And, Roxey," he added, "when I saw myself the next day I looked like—like the devil! How a fellow can tear himself up that way the second time is a mystery to me."

It is a good thing to let a boy figure things out for himself. Jack VanCamp didn't smoke after the first year at it—said it darkened his skin and made his breath bad. He didn't gamble; one needed sleep. As for loafing, there was nothing at the Corners for him. Home was his safety-valve, and there he just turned loose. Shaved and scrubbed, easy in the loose shirts his mother made to suit him, emaculate in white shoes and trousers, he soaked himself in comfort.

The piano was stacked with the songs he liked; magazines littered the tables, the window-seats, the porch. Hours at a stretch, he lay on the grass, relaxed like a young animal, adoring the kiss of wind and sun. When he was away, the place waited. When he returned, it suddenly sang.

"'Lo, Roxey," he'd laugh, lifting her from her feet for a kiss. "'Lo, Gran—and here's the new knitting-needles. Say, Rosy Sunpie Orange Blossom, there's strawberries for supper. No shortcake, mind you. I want the whole six boxes washed with the hulls on. I want a whole bowl of powdered sugar to myself!"

One thing about his struggle—he left it outside the house. Not even with his mother would he discuss the Aylers.

HEPSIBAH was nineteen when she began going with Justin Bealer. She didn't look old enough then to be wooed and married. Her hair, tied back with a flaring bow, hung in two long curls. Some told, jokingly, that she still played with dolls. There had been no inducement, save as youth calls to youth, for her to go with the boys.

When building their bungalow—that was when every other new house began to be a "bungalow"—they built for the child, the girl, the woman. Even Emmett felt the gloom of the big house on the hill. The new one was wideout; soaked in sunshine. Hepsibah's room was half glass—the biggest room in the house. It needed to be. Before she could speak plain, her dolls and frillies filled one side. When she was nineteen, what with books and music, plants, writing table and high-school trophies, there was no space to spare.

The tall house with the windmills was papered and carpeted a hideous green. Hepsibah's room was lined with rose and silver. She had a telephone on the wall, a car in the garage, a party just any time. It seemed absurd at first, the very thought of going with Justin Bealer.

Justin came in with a nice stock of drygoods, to occupy the empty building next the post office. While Liz and Hepsibah looked over some lawns, Justin looked at Hepsibah. That was to be expected. Did not every kid, bachelor and widower in the country, saving and excepting Jack VanCamp, want Ayler's daughter! The law of the unattainable it was.

Maybe Bealer was old at the game. Anyway, he was wise. First off he was

seen going home with Emmett to dinner. He wanted, he said, one square meal like his mother cooked. Ayler, who had squirmed under a sense of banishment, was warmed by the new man's preference. Liz, herself, was not drawn to the storeman, but she remembered acutely how, fifteen years before, a handsome and cruel little caveman had turned his back on Hepsibah. Bealer was well off, good enough looking, quite a catch. Besides, Hepsibah was nineteen. Liz had gone with boys when she was fifteen.

The first time Justin asked Hepsibah to go with him she refused, flat. In fact, he asked her many times before she gave in, and then only for a spin in his new car. Jack VanCamp was walking up the lane when they slewed past, smudging him with sand. He walked on, apparently unmindful. Really, he had been caught by the throat. He saw Hepsibah first—her hair a cloud, her face a pearl, her mouth a rose; eyes purple mysteries under her bending hat. Then he saw the man that drove. It was the first time he had really looked at Bealer.

Justin had, from the first, studied Jack VanCamp. Being skinny, he grinned over Jack's bare throat and arms. He called the heavy hair, nearly always uncovered, a "mane." Justin was never seen without coat and hat. He was almost a head shorter than young VanCamp, the kind of a figure that wears stripes, and his new fall suit was a poem! Above and beyond all, he was in seventh heaven at being seen driving the newest car on the Creek, with Hepsibah Ayler at his side.

Jack had come for the roll of bagging he got in town. He seldom got that close to the house without running in, so he now crossed the drive, circled the big cottonwood by the porch and ran up the steps. His mother sat there alone, finishing him a shirt.

"I wonder," he said, reaching to pinch her ear, "if Rosy Sunpie Orange Blossom's got any pie."

"I sho' is!" Rosy's blue and white uniform flashed in the direction of the icebox, "banana pie, wif meringay!"

Roxey looked after the boy as he crossed the drive, eating. When he flung back a grin, she managed a smile. But after the car had chuckled away with him, her face grew anxious. She, too, had seen Hepsibah Ayler with the new man. Later, when Van Camp came home alone, she waited as long as she could, then asked:

"Where's Jack?"

"I don't know where," was the short reply. "He brought the bagging down," he went on, more gently, "unloaded it and drove off. I thought he was running up for the mail. That's all, honey. It's the first time he ever left without saying something about it. I won't have a son I can't trust."

"How can you help having him?" Roxey tried to smile. "Don't be absurd, John. And don't turn hard. He's fighting something that is bigger than he is. I've been thinking—we may have to go away."

"Go away?"

"Where he won't see—her. You know how he despises the Aylers. It's in his blood."

The woman blushed, painfully. She was past forty, but looked like a girl with the red staining her fine little face. John thought her prettier than she had been that memorable day he had come upon her praying in the hollow of the woods. Loverlike, he reached for her hands and held them.

"I have not told you," Roxey went on, thus comforted, "just how much I once dreaded Emmett Ayler. I—I've tried to forget it, myself."

VanCamp drew first one hand and then the other to his lips. He was the kind of man that does those things. "Tell me," he helped her. "If there is anything that can give me a better understanding, I want to know. I was mad all through when I came."

Haltingly, but with eloquence, his wife told him. Van Camp learned of the ruffianly kiss, down in the field, of the revenge Ayler took for the blow on his mouth, by trying to keep back her cotton crop. In amazement he heard that the tramp from whose desecrating arms the wild-dog had saved her, was no other than Emmett Ayler. He suffered more keenly than she, in the unveiling of these things.

"I never liked Emmett," he said finally, "but I did pity him. I knew how he cared for you, and how it would have been with me if I had lost out, as he did. Still—well, it is a good thing I didn't know—all."

"I never intended you should know," Roxey breathed. "I was afraid you—you'd be a murderer. But—you see now, how it is. My dread and disgust are somehow a part of him. I just can't make him see that Emmett Ayler isn't the man he was."

"No, Liz has fined him up," VanCamp said. "He's all right now—a good neighbor as one could want. It's no use to dig up the past, with him."

"Jack can't see it. And Hepsibah—she is her father's daughter. He is fighting her and—himself."

"You mean he—?"

"Oh, I don't know what I mean. I don't want you to be hard on him, that's all."

"You know, dear," VanCamp spoke slowly, "that I won't—now. If we can't do any better, we'll sell out and go away."

THAT night the two waited up for Jack. They didn't worry anyone else, but after things had settled down, they walked and walked and walked.

Now that they had discussed leaving their Eden, they thought of it as a calamity that would probably have to be. The greatest drawback to a change was Roxey's mother. Mrs. Malone was very frail. She knew exactly the number of steps from room to room; just where her little sewing chair waited on the porch. Like all the old and partially blind, she moved carefully down the last lap of the "sunset way."

Aside from that, they had builded here, from the ground up, and—it was the only home Roxey herself had ever known.

It was late the next day before the car was heard to crash in on the drive. VanCamp, hunched down in his big chair with a newspaper, forced himself to read on. Roxey put the last stitch in the shirt she had held for hours, her hands idle. The boy leaped up the steps swinging a big parcel—berries, of course—by the string. He entered breezily, setting aside the fact that he had given hours of torture.

"'Lo, folks!" He stooped and kissed his mother. "I'm sure starved."

Jack was bareheaded, his hair rough from the wind. He was white, gray-white, as if his blood, lashed and exhausted, slept. He brought the fragrance of the open—blown-dust, sun-soaked leaves, wood-smoke. Offhand, he took the shirt his mother offered and turned into his room. Followed swift splashing, a rushing this way and that. He was out again, shining. He made straight for the dining-room and was the first down.

"Um, um!" he sighed, "that sure hits the spot," as he selected a strawberry, dipped it in powdered sugar and crushed it between his teeth. "First bites I've had since yesterday. I—I drove all night. Don't know how many times I got gasoline."

"Where," asked VanCamp, casually, "did you drive?"

"Just everywhere, Dad. I've ruined the car. Spring broke. Three tires missing and one in rags. I didn't know it, though, till I got in."

VanCamp slipped a glance to his wife. "Oh, well," he said, "the car was old. We'll get another. Pass the chicken, Rosy."

Later Roxey found the boy lying on the bed, arms across his eyes. "Asleep?" she asked, softly. He shook his head. "Jackie," she murmured, sitting beside him and resting her cheek on his shoulder, "I nearly died last night."

Jack groped for her hand. "I know," he said simply. "I did, too."

"Dear," Roxey pleaded, "I wish you'd tell me all about it. I know that you've always hated Emmett Ayler. Now, because of him—Honey, tell your mother."

"I can't. I don't know how. It's just the way it is." Suddenly the boy gave the hand he held a crushing grip. "I wish you'd never speak of Emmett Ayler again," he said, violently. "I can't bear it. I do hate him—hate him as something uncanny—unclean. He isn't a man; he—he's a *thing!* Even his hands—his long, fishy hands!

"Roxey, I'd like to cut into his skull and see if his brains aren't ashes; I'd like to stick a knife in him and find if his blood isn't vinegar. When I was a little chap, I used to stand behind the sunflowers and shy rocks at him. I used to pray to the devil to come and get him."

"Son!"

"Oh, I know it's a raw streak in me. Maybe I'd have outgrown it if—" Suddenly he laid his mother's hand from him. "Don't let's talk about it. Maybe I can sleep."

HEPSIBAH AYLER was helping her mother wash dishes. Liz always washed, and Hepsibah wiped. Mrs. Ayler was an excellent housekeeper—dish-washing, a ceremony.

These two loved to work together. They always kept up a patter of talk, fond and confidential. The girl was polishing a cut-glass berry-dish when Liz held her tongue to listen.

"There's Justin Bealer, coming with your father. Maybe you'd better—"

She paused, her hands in the suds, dark eyes looking her girl over critically. She had started to say "maybe you'd better run and change your dress, but there was no fault to find with Hepsibah's dainty blue-silk, nor the frost of tatting that turned back from her pearly throat.

When the men came up the walk into the living-room, Emmett was heard to offer a chair. Then came the caller's intimate, "Oh, I'm going out and visit with the women-folks!"

Hepsibah's "good-evening" was careless, though she smiled prettily. "Give me a tea-towel and we'll rush this through," Bealer told her. "I want us to run up on the hill and watch the camp-meeting folks awhile, if Mrs. Ayler don't mind. Would brought the car, but it's got a bad tire."

Liz didn't mind. She and Emmett both liked company. Not that they wanted Hepsibah to marry Justin Bealer—they didn't want her to grow old-maidish. It was pleasant to watch Justin pick out a bright yellow bowl with a blue band and polish it vigorously.

"Where does it go, Mrs. Ayler?"

Liz told him. In setting the bowl up, the man's hand touched Hepsibah's bare arm, and he laughed to see her draw back, frowning. He liked the girl's "offishness."

"You're the oddest little rascal I ever kept company with, Hepsibah Ayler," he chuckled later, as they strolled up the lane. "Do you know it?"

"I never thought much about it," Hepsibah replied.

"You cute little thing! Well, it's time you *thought.*"

Now, a lane is a pretty place in the autumn. This was an east and west thread of coolness, not much changed since John VanCamp and Roxey loitered there in heavenly contentment, more than twenty years before. On the left, going west, was the old half-log house where Roxey and her mother had sheltered that first night on Bear Creek. Above it, a clean-cut picture, was the cottage John had builded for his bride. Just now the wide veranda in front was occupied. VanCamp lounged in the hammock;

Roxey and Jack sat on the top step. Bealer stared a minute, then said, maliciously:

"There's our friend, the giant, in the bosom of his family. Why don't he wear some clothes? He makes me tired."

Hepsibah wouldn't look. She tripped a little, in her high heels, and Bealer's ready hand shot out to catch her. "Oh, I know all about you and him," he laughed. "First thing I heard was how you two had your claws out at each other. Young VanCamp has eaten sour grapes, I take it. I can put two and two together."

"I wish you wouldn't!" Hepsibah's voice was spunky. "I don't care to hear anything about him."

"Then you needn't!" Bealer grinned. "We'll talk about *just us.*"

SEPTEMBER light lingers on Bear Creek. Even after the sun had burned its way behind the fringe of the hill, a warm smile slanted down across the VanCamp roof, tipped the cottonwoods with fire and smouldered upon the lane.

At the moment Bealer was having his little joke about the "giant," the VanCamps saw him and Hepsibah. They talked of other things, though. VanCamp was explaining the necessity of a new seed-house at the gin, and went on planning until he found he was wasting his breath. Then, of a sudden, he felt tired and out of humor. John was close to fifty, and had always "dug." The way the boy had taken hold he had looked for him to shoulder some things. Not that Jack was lazy. It was just that when one needed him most, he withdrew into himself, as now. It was as Roxey suggested; they would have to "pull stakes." Stiffly he climbed out of the hammock, and took himself off to bed.

Roxey went in as he did, but with no thought of sleeping. A premonition of coming disaster chilled and frightened her. Wrapped in a kimona she slipped back to brush her hair and braid it for night. Jack usually did this for her, but he made no move to now. He didn't even notice when she finally went away.

It was very still and dim, there on the veranda, but little wimples of sound and scent and light filtered in. Up on the hill the camp-meeting folks were singing "Rock of ages, cleft for me," and down in the old house Rosy Sunpie and her "Man Sam" crooned a melodious echo. A whippoorwill, in the lush hollow south, called to its mate; a coyote shrilled to the little wolf with cubs. A heady fragrance of honeying maypop and persimmon came and went with the breeze, crossed by the wistful glimmer of a new moon.

Fate stood at Jack VanCamp's shoulder, prodding him. So Hepsibah Ayler was going to marry the new man! It amounted to that, when a girl cared enough to *walk* with a fellow. Jack had gone miles out of his way to keep from meeting Ayler's daughter. Meeting in spite of himself, had been like red-hot iron on his flesh. There was no "play even" on his part—the feud was there, a soul-breaking thing.

In spite of it, life had been intoxicating—the sun, the wind, melody, hunger, sleep, waking. In his farthest self he knew what would have made life the perfect thing. He had felt fate marching upon him, and turned aside. It came to him with a rush what he would have to do now. And suddenly he stood up. Leaving the porch quietly, he crossed the lawn and the drive, ran out the new car and looked it over. Stepping in, he backed to the lane.

The sound, muffled as it was, must have reached the house, but that could not be helped. Reversing, he climbed the slope by a motor track around the old Ayler orchard, circled south and stopped on the far edge of the camp-meeting ground. Relaxed there, in waiting, he saw Bealer and Hepsibah emerge

from the light, between groups that milled around the fringe of the arbor. They came on slowly, picking their way around brush-heaps. He let them get close, then stepped out and stood in their path. Bealer spoke:

"Gosh, VanCamp, is that you? I took you for a white mule, or something." His voice was easy, almost insulting. He started to guide his companion around the car. "Careful of your dress," he cautioned.

Jack said, evenly, "Never mind that, Bealer. Just go on—*alone.*"

"What?"

"You heard me."

The store-man flung back, contemptuously, "What's the matter with you? Let us by."

Jack did not want to attract attention. Without another word he swung forward, picked Hepsibah up and put her over into the car. An instant he felt the softness of her bare arm on his neck, the sweep of hair across his eyes, then his pounding heart steadied. When the other man struck out with all his might, he simply caught and held him.

"I could break your darned neck with one hand, Bealer," he stated, with truth, "but I haven't time. Still—" he made a quick move and Justin stepped back. "Good," he added, "you've got sense." In another moment he was in the car and had started it northward. It was all done in a flash. The machine sped to the top of the slope and started down. Here it was washed in gullies, and the boy did not play with chance; but when he slipped down into the level spaces, he "split the breeze."

The night was hot, but moist and innocent with the ineffable odors of greenbrier and bittersweet. The driver felt his thin shirt balloon and cling, his hair lift and whip his forehead. Above the fairylike fringe of elms on the Branch, the thin cradle of silver rocked with the motion of the car. Fireflies flooded from the dusk and fled behind, the tang of burning brush stung the eyes and throat.

There was no sound from Hepsibah; apparently she had been smitten breathless. Slanting a look, Jack saw that she huddled in her corner, her face in her two little hands. He wondered if she were praying. They swung past a camper's wagon, lurching her against him, but she was back again, with only a fleeting touch.

A huddle of rocks leaped toward them, and the boy leaned over the wheel, his face thrust sharply forward, his hair wiped back like a runner's. Then they had zig-zagged between the boulders and were out again, the level road two blurred bands on either side. They swung around a dim half-moon of lake, past bursted cotton that glimmered along the fields like folded sheep; edged a town blinking high against a rise, pitched between castles of time-eroded rock overhanging the sheer bluff on the river, and finally plunged downward to long smooth stretches that glided finally into the sprawling centipede of light that was the county seat. Jack VanCamp had counted on making twenty miles in three-quarters of an hour. He had done better than that.

The city was in full swing—would be for hours. It was a shaded place, with grass growing up through the pavements. The pungent scent of trees that had felt a touch of frost mingled with the acrid breath of dahlias and chrysanthemums along the parking. Arc-lamps, where bloated toads blinked amid banquets of stunned beetles, flashed by. A library building with brass dogs guarding the entrance, held a fan of incandescence above the door. Just short of the shops, before a low, well-lighted house, the car stopped.

When the boy stepped out and held his hand to Hepsibah, she looked away; but when he made a motion to take her, she followed him across the pavement into a porch, without a word. While he rang the door-bell and waited, she man-

aged to tidy her hair, straighten her collar, smooth her skirts and—breath.

For the rest, she had a benumbing picture of a keen-looking man with a half-smoked cigar, answering the ring; of Jack introducing her with the comment that they had come to be married. While the two stepped over to the office for a license, she sat engulfed in a huge chair, with two young women for company. She did not know what they said, nor was she answered. When she was finally told to stand up, she steadied herself by looking at a silvery picture of "Spring" over the fireplace.

The young women spoke of that, later. They said Miss Ayler had only looked at VanCamp once, and that was when he talked over the telephone with her father. They remarked that the young couple had not spoken *to* each other at all; which *was* odd. Still, it wasn't. Years ago, on Bear Creek, a small tyrant had found a blue-eyed tot in a lane and held out his hand, with wordless authority. The "tot" had not lisped a word, simply followed. Chopping off fifteen scornful years, as if they had not been, made words the most futile thing in the world.

THERE is no darkness like the wee sma' hours following the newest moon. It seemed to Jack VanCamp that he sensed the traps of rock and sand miles ahead—that every fiber of him was light itself, lent to protect what he had, in desperation, taken.

He was afraid of the girl huddled there in the corner, gripping the cushions to keep from touching him, but one thing glorified the fear. Brought to the test, Hepsibah Ayler need not have stood up and married him. He knew that once he had told her father to take her away. He remembered, too, that when he went back for another glimpse of her, she had screamed after him. He knew that, ever since, she had hungered for him as he had for her.

Near home he stopped the car. They were at the foot of the slope, where a stiffish breeze always blew up from the Branch. He knew the girl was trembling with cold, because he was himself. Suddenly he took her in his arms, drew her across his breast and folded her close. He felt her struggle, twisting away from him, bruising her small strength. He knew that she gritted her teeth to keep back the tears.

It was the *feud* that Hepsibah fought; he knew it. When she finally stopped trembling and turned her face into his neck, it was the boy of the lane she had gone back through the silences to find. Jack VanCamp's cheeks were wet, when he found the wheel and started the car up the slope.

Mrs. VanCamp had not slept. She lay with her wet handkerchief clutched in her hand, listening, listening. She knew that night was a crisis; but how? She thought of the boy, of Emmett Ayler, Hepsibah Ayler, Bealer. It was one of those desperate moments when life is a distorted thing; when only the worst can be. When at last she heard the car, she fumbled for her kimona and slippers, passing quietly out into the living-room.

She had managed to light the piano lamp, when steps sounded, crossing the veranda. She caught at a chair to steady herself, her face white between folds of bright hair. Then she saw Jack—and Hepsibah! The daughter of Ayler stood straight, one fine arm lifted against the glare of light. From the tumbled cloud on her forehead to her silk-shod feet, she had the appeal of a little lost child, that has stumbled home.

Roxey crossed the room and took Hepsibah in her arms. Then she smiled up at her son, waiting for him to speak. He was the same glorious young giant who had petted and tortured her—the same, and yet different. She knew by the white fire of his face. It was as if some divine acid had worked through his being, eating out the hatred engrafted there. Love had wrought the miracle.

THE GREAT DETECTIVE

By ELLIS PARKER BUTLER

Entered in the BLACK CAT *Short Story Contest*

LD Mabry was not old, but he was called old and he looked old. At the most he had seen fifty-five years, but his back was rounded and his head bald, and weariness and hopelessness marked his face. He was a tired man and always physically sick with the hepatic ills that come to a man who sits too long on an office stool and eats too much and too gloomily, and who broods on his troubles. He was bookkeeper for Thomas Brant, wholesale crockery, and had been for thirty years.

Old Mabry was not a good bookkeeper. He had not been born to be an accountant of any sort. His trial balances—a regular first-of-each-month affair—never balanced until he had spent night after night checking and rechecking his huge ledger and journal. For thirty years he had been a slave of the huge ledger and the handy recipient of Thomas Brant's bitter ill humors and cutting sarcasms. He was shamefully underpaid, as such men always are; and he was hopelessly discouraged.

This Saturday he returned from his noon dinner, his head low and his eyes with the dull, hunted look of a wounded animal. Old Mabry had nine children and a wife, and he was three months back in his rent. His oldest girl, Mary, was to graduate from the high school and must have a suitable dress. Peter and Jane needed shoes. A note from his landlord notified him that he must pay the rent in full before night or move out of the house immediately. His wife had told him the grate in the kitchen stove was in ruins and that it was really not worth while getting a new one—the old stove was in such bad shape it was not worth repairing. Old Mabry knew he would be unable to get another stove on credit. He owed everyone, and he had no credit. At the office he had overdrawn his account almost a hundred dollars, and Thomas Brant had scolded him well for it that very morning. Old Mabry's tragedy was the tragedy of a man trying to support a family of eleven on a salary of seventy-five dollars a month.

He entered the front door of the store —Thomas Brant ran a retail shop in connection with his wholesale business— and passed between the counters to the office at the rear of the store. He entered the office, took off his street coat and donned his black office coat, with the ink stains on the cuffs and lapels, and went to his desk. At the moment he was alone in the office. He slid onto his high stool and for a minute rested his elbow on the edge of the desk, burying his eyes in his hand. Then he sighed, shook his head and opened the big ledger he had left on the desk when he went to dinner.

The ledger opened at the folio where he had placed Sam Carter's weekly expense and collection report.

Sam Carter was one of Thomas Brant's five traveling salesmen, and the only one who came in weekly, the others having two-week routes. Carter had reached the office a few minutes before twelve and had handed old Mabry his report, sealed in a long envelope. Old Mabry had taken it and had slipped it between the pages of the big ledger as

Carter went out. This was inexcusably careless. Ten thousand times Thomas Brant had told old Mabry that he was inexcusably careless, in one way and another.

There was no excuse for what old Mabry had done. There was no excuse for leaving the big ledger on the desk. It should have been put in the safe, and Carter's report should have been put in the safe, and the safe should then have been locked. Instead of this, old Mabry had merely closed the safe, "setting" the combination lock, and had closed the ledger upon Carter's long envelope. Ten thousand times this would have been safe enough, although inexcusable. This time it had not been safe enough.

When old Mabry opened the ledger the long envelope was still between the pages, but he saw at a glance that it was not as he had left it. The envelope had been torn open carelessly, leaving jagged edges of paper. It had not been torn when he closed the big ledger upon it before going to dinner.

Old Mabry drew out of the envelope the sheet of expenses and collections Carter had made out and looked at it. At the bottom, following the printed words, "Balance in cash herewith," Carter had written "$515.25." Automatically, old Mabry shook the envelope, and a silver quarter of a dollar fell on the desk and rolled to the floor. It rolled under the safe.

Automatically, also, old Mabry ran his pencil up and down the figures of Carter's report and found they were correct. Five hundred and fifteen dollars had been taken from the envelope while he was at dinner, if Carter had put the money in the envelope as he should have done, and old Mabry did not doubt that Carter had done so.

Old Mabry folded Carter's report and slipped it back in the envelope. He laid the envelope on the huge ledger and once more placed his elbow on the edge of the desk. He rested his chin on his hand and looked out of the window, letting his sick mind grind as it chose. Through the window he saw only the brick wall of Thomas Brant's pottery warehouse, where jugs, crocks and pots were stored, and the one window where, for many years, wisps of straw and cobwebs had been old Mabry's only view. He closed his eyes and sighed deeply. It is possible that he even slept for a moment while his eyes were thus closed, but when he opened his eyes he moved backward on his stool a few inches and opened the drawer of his desk. From the rubbish there he took the revolver that had rested in the drawer for many years. He felt carefully for the location of his heart and fired. As he fell the stool fell also. Elias Higginbotham, the manager of the retail, heard the shot and the noise of the falling body and stool and came hurrying to the office window. He was a tall, lanky man and shuffled his feet when he walked as if he wore carpet slippers. He had a thin, long face and small side whiskers. He had to stoop a little to look into the office window, and he saw old Mabry lying on the floor, the blood beginning to stain the floor. There was no other person in the store at the moment. Higginbotham bent lower and stared, craning his neck like some lanky bird. Then he turned and shuffled to the front door and met Thomas Brant as he entered.

"Old Mabry's killed himself," he said. "Just now. I heard the shot and went and looked."

He was trembling like a leaf.

"The devil you say! In the office? I've been afraid he would," said Brant. "Come on."

But Higginbotham could not follow Brant. He was able to enter the store and then his knees gave way and he dropped into a chair there. His face turned as white as death and cold perspiration oozed out upon his forehead. He shook as if with a chill. Twice he tried to arise, but could not manage it.

The third time, however, by holding to the back of the chair, he got to his feet and staggered to the street. With one hand against a lamp post he stood and was deathly sick.

Brant, his rather cruel face drawn into a frown of annoyance, hurried to the office and bent over old Mabry. The man was dead. Brant turned to the telephone—then a new invention—and gave the two long, two short and one long rings that connected him with Dr. Blossom, the coroner.

"There's been a suicide in my office—Thomas Brant's office—and I want you to come right down," he said. "Old Mabry's killed himself; shot himself. Come as soon as you can."

He replaced the receiver and looked down at the dead Mabry. Then he looked at Mabry's desk and saw the torn envelope. He picked it up and drew out the Carter report, and looked in the envelope for the money the report called for. It was not there, of course. He drew his bunch of keys from his pocket and went to the safe, opened the great iron door and then the cash drawer. There was nothing like five hundred dollars in the safe. He looked down at Mabry again.

Brant went to the telephone again. He gave one long and one short ring.

"This the First National?" he asked. "Is Beckerman there? That you, Beckerman? I've got the job for you now, Beckerman; at the salary we talked about—sixty dollars a month. You can begin now—as soon as your bank closes to-day. Yes, bookkeeper. Mabry's dead. He killed himself. If you can manage to come as soon as the bank closes and look over the books to-night and to-morrow I'll like it. I'm afraid there's a defalcation. No, I don't know how much. Thank you."

Brant placed the receiver on its hook, still frowning, and he was frowning when he heard a voice he knew well—his wife's voice. She had entered the store and was speaking to Higginbotham, who was making unintelligible replies, apparently, for she came hurrying toward the office. Brant stepped over Mabry's body and from the office into the store, closing the office door just as his wife reached it.

"No, don't go in there," he said harshly. She had put out her hand to open the door, for she liked better to say what she had to say in the office.

"Why not? What's the matter? What's wrong with Higginbotham? What's wrong, Thomas?"

"Mabry," her husband answered. "He's killed himself. Shot himself. He's in there. I think he's short in his cash—five hundred at least; I don't know how much more. Why didn't you come home to dinner?"

"Mabry? Dead? Killed himself?"

She put out her hand and touched Brant's arm.

"I said so, didn't I?" Brant asked harshly. "Why didn't you come home for dinner? I waited—"

"Oh, don't!" she cried. "What does that matter, when he's dead in there? Think of his poor wife—his children. Oh, I'm so sorry! He was always so—so—"

"So what?"

"I don't know. I don't know what I'm saying. I mean he was a gentleman—always a gentleman. I always felt so sorry for him. Nine children!"

"I waited half an hour for you to come to dinner," said Brant. "Why didn't you telephone? If you had telephoned, or had come home in time for dinner, I might have been here."

"Oh, don't, Thomas!" she cried. "You sound as if I was to blame. As if—"

"Well, you ought to get home for dinner. Where were you?"

"Shopping. Just shopping."

"Well, this time maybe your eternal shopping killed a man," said Brant. "Aren't there enough hours to shop without shopping all noon?"

"Oh, please!" she begged. "It was a man from Chicago—the fur-coat man. He was showing his samples at Dorman's, and was leaving on the one o'clock."

"I told you never to buy anything of that Dorman. I told you I had told him I'd never pay him a cent for anything you bought there. If—"

What his threat might have been will not be known, for the coroner came then, with Carter, who had reached the store at the same moment.

There was little for the coroner to do. Carter, a fat man, with a traveling man's sang froid, leaned against the office windowsill while the coroner did what he had to do, and Brant told the little he knew.

The coroner would attend to the rest —the removal of the body to Murphy's morgue and so on—he said, and went away. Brant turned to Carter.

"The money you had in your collection envelope is gone," he said. "You put it in, didn't you?"

"Me? Put it in? Sure! I gave it to Mabry before dinner."

"Sealed?"

"Sealed? No. What should I seal it for?"

Brant handled the torn envelope.

"I'm going," Mrs. Brant said from outside. "I'm going up and see—Mrs. Mabry. Has anyone told her?"

"No," said Brant, and added, "you be home for supper."

His wife did not answer.

"You're not hard up, Carter?" Brant asked. "You're not short of cash—pressed for money?"

"Me? No. Why should I be?" asked Carter, reddening. "You don't mean—"

"The money's gone," said Brant. "I can't prove you put it in the envelope. You can't, either, can you?"

"He killed himself, didn't he?" asked Carter. "What did he do that for?"

"How did he expect to get away with it? All right, he didn't expect to, if he killed himself. But how— I suppose he came in here and ripped open the envelope and sent the money to his wife. I suppose that was it. She'll have to give it back. You're sure you put it in the—"

"That's enough of that," said Carter, angrily. "I told you I put that money in the envelope, and that's enough!"

He was going to say more but was interrupted. Hurriedly and perspiring, another man entered the office—a young man—the assistant bookkeeper and bill clerk, Billy Branscome. He stopped and gazed at Mabry's body with horror.

"And you?" demanded Brant. "How about you? What do you know about the money Carter left in the envelope? Anything?"

He looked at his watch. Branscome was not late. The rule was that Brant and old Mabry left the office half an hour apart, Brant first, then old Mabry, and then Billy Branscome half an hour later, when Brant was due to return. Branscome was frightened now.

"Is—is it gone?" he stammered.

"Yes, gone," said Brant. "And I want to know where it has gone. I don't let five hundred dollars go that easy. What do you know about it?"

"Why—why, if he killed himself, didn't he take it?" the boy asked.

"What do you know about it? That's what I asked you," said Brant.

"Why, I—it was there when I went to dinner," said Branscome. "I saw Mr. Mabry put it there. The envelope, I mean. Not the money. I didn't know how much money there was. Mr. Carter said 'Here's my report,' and gave the envelope to Mr. Mabry, and went out. And Mr. Mabry put it in the ledger and closed the ledger on it, and set the lock of the safe and went to dinner. That's all I know. And when it was time for me to go to dinner I went. I told Mr. Higginbotham I was going. That's all I know."

"You might have took it, then?" Brant asked. "You were alone here?"

"You've no right to say—"

"I've a right to say what I please," said Brant. "And I've a right to think what I please."

He went to the safe and looked into the cash drawer again and to the desk and ran through the pages of the ledger. Then he went out. Branscome looked down at the dead Mabry.

"It's awful, isn't it?" he said. "Are —are they going to leave him here? Like this?"

"Murphy's coming for him," said Carter.

"I guess I'll go out in the other room, then," said Branscome.

"Here, too," said Carter, and they left the dead Mabry in possession of the office where he had spent so many long years earning so few miserable dollars. It was a pity he could not be entombed there, as men were entombed at Pompeii —a miserable man dead in the place where his life had yielded him nothing but misery.

What with Mrs. Brant going directly from the shop to the Mabry home, there was no question that Mrs. Mabry should hear of the death of old Mabry soon enough. Mrs. Brant broke the sad news gently enough, but it was not surprising that Mrs. Mabry should topple to the floor in a faint, with four startled children weeping and clinging to their mother's skirts.

Mary, the eldest daughter, helped Mrs. Brant lift Mrs. Mabry to a couch—it sagged to the floor in the middle when they placed her on its threadbare upholstery—and went for the ammonia. It was the first time Mrs. Brant had ever been in the house and she noticed that it was all threadbare and miserable. Mrs. Mabry, gasping from the sharp ammonia fumes, opened her eyes and sat up.

"I've been afraid of this," she said, so wearily and sadly. "He did get so discouraged. I should have cheered him up more, but I got so tired and discouraged, too. I don't know what is ever going to become of us now. It was hard enough before. I—he was so—"

She put her hand over her eyes and began to cry, her lower face quite unlovely as the grief distorted it. Mary tried to comfort her, saying: "There, mother! We'll get along. I can go to work somewhere. And Henry's old enough—" but Mrs. Mabry was now weeping harder.

Mrs. Brant arose. She had said nothing of the missing money, and she said nothing of it now.

"If I can be of any help—" she said and went out.

Except for Murphy, the undertaker, young Branscome was the first to come to the house, except a few kindly neighbors. Branscome came that same evening after supper, as he had come many times before, for he was in love with Mary. "Cradle robber," some of his friends had called him for trying to persuade Mary to marry him as soon as she graduated. How near cradle robbing it had threatened to be was testified by the readiness with which Mary now wept her sorrow on young Branscome's shoulder on the little side porch behind the morning glory vines.

"And I'm going to quit him—quit Brant," Branscome declared. "I don't stand for his kind of talk. He dared suggest I took that money—"

"What money?" Mary asked quickly, and, as he did not answer, being angry that he had mentioned the missing money in his thoughtlessness, she added: "Is there money missing, Billy? Did father take any money? Did he?"

"No. Nobody took any. I don't know. I didn't take it. I don't know who took it."

Mary drew away from him gently.

"Then father did take money?" she said, rather than asked. She held his hand a moment longer and then let her own glide from it. "I must go in now," she said gently. "I don't think you'd

better come any more, Billy. I think not. Not if—not if father did anything like that."

She would not see him again. The funeral was held Monday and on Tuesday the Mabrys disappeared from the town, all except Mary. She ended her school year and was given her diploma and excused from the graduation exercises in the Opera House. Then she, too, disappeared.

There was no great mystery in the disappearance of the family. There was but one place to which the family could go, and that was to Mrs. Mabry's father's farm, some thirty miles back in the state. Twice young Branscome went there, but Mary had gone to take a position elsewhere. She had asked her mother not to tell where, and Mrs. Mabry did not tell. Once only a lawyer hunted up Mrs. Mabry, asking about the five hundred dollars. "If she got it she won't say so," he told Brant, "and you can't make her. Just forget it and raise the price of pie dishes a couple of notches and make another five hundred —that's my advice."

So thus the whole matter rested, in a manner comfortable for all but the Mabrys, who, naturally, did not count for much, for they were the family of a suicide and a defaulter, as was understood in the town, and as was understood by themselves. Even Mary had no doubt that old Mabry had taken the money. She put young Branscome out of her mind as thoroughly as she could—which meant she tucked him away in the dearest corner of her heart—and went about her harsh work of doing her best to provide food and poor raiment and cheap shelter for her mother and brothers and sisters. She did this bravely, but without holding her head high. The daughter of a suicide thief does not hold her head high.

So time passed. Thomas Brant made more money. Elias Higginbotham, shuffling back and forth, was suspected of stealing kerosene from the store because he carried an oil can back and forth now and then, and was spied upon and found to be carrying whiskey from a saloon to his bedroom, and was discharged by Brant. Sam Carter flew in a rage over a question regarding his expense account and went to a rival wholesale house. Billy Branscome left Brant as he had threatened and went to the bank, taking Beckerman's job there in time. In the town where he had lived and died, old Mabry was quite forgotten, it seemed, and his theft and death were forgotten, and his family forgotten, except when they were remembered as a family that had fled because of the disgrace of the father. If Higginbotham, or Carter, or Billy Branscome, or any other, had taken the five hundred and fifteen dollars from the heavy ledger that day it seemed likely the fact would never be known. It was the duty of no man to pry into the mystery. Indeed, there was no mystery apparent; there was no one, except the single person who had taken the money, that did not believe old Mabry was the thief. His own family believed this.

There was, however, during the ten long years that dragged between the day Mary Mabry heard of her father's death and the day when she reached her twenty-sixth year, a great detective at work on the mystery—the greatest detective and solver of mysteries—old Father Time.

With his inexorable finger, Time pushed the hands of the clock of the world forward by imperceptible degrees and a day was gone, and still another day, and at length a year, and still his finger moved and could not be stopped. Slender Mary Mabry grew plumper, and Thomas Brant became, before he expected it, "old" Thomas Brant, and Mrs. Mabry faded and died, and Billy Branscome became a grave-faced man and cashier of the bank, and little Matty Mabry—of whom we have not even heard a word thus far—entered high school and grad-

uated therefrom and entered the training school for nurses of the Riverbank Hospital and graduated there and was a registered nurse.

On all the men and women and children of the whole world, Father Time did his work, and Mrs. Brant did not escape. She had been fifty when old Mabry killed himself, and a handsome fifty, a stylish, vividily-living fifty. Then, moment by moment, and day by day, and year by year, Father Time, the great solver of mysteries, worked on the Mabry mystery. With a tool as fine as the finest hair, he began carving wrinkles on the face of Mrs. Brant; with a brush as delicate as the scale from a butterfly's wing, he began painting one hair and then another hair of her head white. From his vast laboratory he took infinitesimal chemicals and stiffened her joints and roughed her skin and hardened her veins and arteries and poisoned her blood and dulled her heart until she was an old woman of sixty. For one whole year he watched and watered a pain in her side until, one night, she screamed aloud because of it and was hurried to the hospital.

"Mary," she said faintly the third day after the operation.

"I'm Matty," her nurse said soothingly.

"Yes; it's all the same when I'm dying —Mary or Matty or anyone. It's in the bottom of the trunk; the big trunk in the far corner of the attic. They'll find it when I'm dead, so I may as well tell. Thomas will know. I stole it."

"Please! You are not yourself. If you could go to sleep—"

"It's a fur coat, the one I bought at Dorman's when the man from Chicago was showing his samples. I chose it and ran back to the store to ask Thomas for money, but he was gone. No one was there but Higginbotham, and I asked him for money. He went to the office with me, and Carter came back then. So Carter opened the envelope. Will Branscome will understand; he knows what I mean. And when I went back to tell Thomas about it old Mabry was dead. I was afraid to tell; we were all afraid. That's why I hid the coat and never wore it. But they will find it when I am dead. Thomas will know; he's keen. Tell Will Branscome. Tell everyone your father did not steal."

"Yes, yes! But try to rest now."

"Yes, I can rest now."

She closed her eyes and sighed deeply. Presently she opened them again.

"You promised," she said. "You said you would tell them. You will tell them?"

"I will. I promise, Mrs. Brant."

"I'm happy," said the sick woman. "You don't know how happy I am now. It has been a load on my mind for years. And always growing heavier as time passed—as time passed."

Matty Mabry walked softly to the door as the sick woman closed her eyes. She bent over the telephone in the hall.

"Have Dr. Hetherton come to room forty at once, please," she said. "Mrs. Brant is dying. And will you telephone Mr. Brant?"

She hesitated a moment.

"And will you get the First National and ask William Branscome to come to the hospital in an hour, please? Thank you!"

The nurse went back to her patient, and Father Time, the master detective, moved his slow finger onward, solving other mysteries, righting other wrongs.

THE SPEED SHARK

By EDWIN DIAL TORGERSON

Entered in the BLACK CAT *Short Story Contest*

HE harbor of Biloxi was agleam with festive lanterns that trailed their light over the trembling surface of the bay. And from all those dots of brilliance over the water, which marked the presence of a variegated fleet of sailing yachts, steam yachts and motorboats, there arose a strange medley of tinkling mandolins and the minor wail of ukuleles. It was the night before the regatta.

Not all the merrymakers were aboard ship. The Yacht Club, a structure built out over the water at the end of a pier, was thronged for the occasion of a dance. The music had paused for the supper intermission, and debonair sailor men in evening duck were chatting away for dear life with pink-faced maids.

On the forward deck of the dormitory floor above the dance hall, there was the silence of bored or contented stagdom. Despite the fact that the bar now made ostentatious specialty of ginger ale and soda pop, there were those among the loungers on the front gallery who still found it possible to uphold the bibulous traditions of the salt, salt sea.

Among them were Horace Pearsall, skipper of the oft-converted sloop Wampus Cat, of Mobile; David Colt, his obese first mate, and Charley Tinman, second mate, boatswain, steward and what-not.

They had sipped their soothing highballs for fully fifteen minutes without saying a word; but when the music ceased and there floated up to them only the banalities of intermission talk, they squirmed uneasily in their seats. They arose after a while, and moved to the extreme end of the gallery, where there would be less noise from below. They glanced down where the first-floor gallery protruded further out over the water. Even here they were not safe from annoyance. A man and a girl were conversing loudly and spiritedly, and the man's voice was not of the Gulf Coast. It was English, or Boston, or something.

"And you are the master of the Cliquot!" the girl was repeating. "Oh, I'm thrilled to death to hear it, Captain Smiley. And she's never been defeated, not even on the Eastern seaboard?"

"Not a sloop in any class can touch her," boasted the yachtsman. "These boats you have down here are mere tubs compared to her."

"But there's the Cricket!" protested the girl. "She was once a champion Canadian sloop. And there's the Petit Bois, and the Salamander. They're fast boats, and our boys know how to sail them."

"Junk," sneered the visitor. "The Cliquot will run away from them. There won't be any regatta to-morrow, I tell you."

A sprightly fox trot announced the recommencement of the dance, and they went back into the ballroom.

Pearsall turned to his mates.

"Did you hear that fresh catfish, boys?" he demanded. "The Cricket is a tub, and the Petit Bois and Salamander are junk! By the eternal stingarees, I'll bet the Wampus Cat could—"

"Softly, softly, Captain," soothed

David Colt. "Remember, the Wampus Cat has been converted into a cruiser. What chance would she have against a champion racer, with that clumsy dang-busted cabin you've built on her?"

"That cabin," returned the skipper, haughtily, "is also convertible. You can knock it off in fifteen minutes. Where's Wall-Eye?"

"You're crazy, Horace!" exclaimed Tinman. "That's those Havana highballs talking."

"Shut up," snapped Pearsall. "Where's Wall-Eye?"

"The last time I saw him he was floating around with that sporty Nova Scotian negro that sails on the Cliquot."

"That's his orders," said Pearsall, "but he ought to be back by now."

"Orders?"

"Yep. Orders. I gave him twenty dollars and three hours' shore leave—on condition that he get that nigger drunk."

"Ah!" gasped Colt and Tinman, in unison. "You don't mean, Cap," demanded Dave, "that you're actually counting on racing against the Cliquot?"

"I don't mean that I was, but I mean that I am now. You think we can let these silk-stocking beach lizards come down here and run away with our regatta? Go down and see if you can find Wall-Eye, Colt."

Colt did as he was bidden, and Pearsall and Tinman moved over to join another group of sailors who were talking regatta.

"Men," said Horace, "I've fooled around at these regattas for seven years now, and I won a couple of cups before I took my boat out of the racing class. I swear I'd be ashamed of the Gulf Coast if you let this Cliquot bunch go back to Boston with the Class I sloop trophy."

"But what chance have we got," protested one of the yachtsmen. "They've swabbed up the whole Atlantic seaboard, and—"

"Say!" Pearsall leaned over in confidential earnestness. "If I find a way to make a monkey out of this fresh Cliquot skipper, will you boys stand by me?"

"Oh, no! Nothing like that. Only straight sailing, you know—"

"Yes, I know! And I don't want anybody to suggest that I'm in favor of fouling the Cliquot or anything dirty."

"All right, but—"

"Will you fellows help me to beat the Cliquot?"

"Spill it, spill it!" they chorused. "What's the game?"

"Sharks," said Pearsall, grimly. "I don't want you chaps to do a thing but talk sharks. Talk 'em grisly, talk 'em bloody. Go get the Cliquot crowd when the dance breaks up, one of you fellows—invite 'em to a pair of real Scotch highballs, direct from Cuba. Get 'em up here—and anything I say about sharks, you agree, all of you! Is that understood?"

The mystified yachtsmen thought they caught an inkling of the plan, but they were doubtful of its soundness. A committee went down to fetch the visiting sailors.

Meanwhile, Dave Colt returned with Wall-Eye Joe, able seaman of the Wampus Cat, in his wake, a grinning vision in alabastrine ducks that matched the gleam of his teeth and his eyeballs.

"Boss, dat nigger ain't gwine sail no Cliquot to-morrow," chuckled Joe. "I done int'oduced him to a South-ern 'queen, what vampired him fust and now she's entertainin' him wid shinny an' good ol' corn liquor!"

"Shh!" warned Pearsall. "You haven't seen him to-night, if anybody should ask you, see?"

"Naw, suh. I ain't seen him, but I sho is heard enough o' dat highfalutin' coon. He call he'self a British subject, an' says he's a Squads Right Mason, and talk like he's better'n white folks. I done tol' dat fool to shut his mouf."

"Well, he won't talk to-morrow, will he?"

"Naw, suh. He won't talk to-morrow, *a*-tall!"

"All right. Now hang around, Wall-Eye, and help serve drinks when we get these Eastern gentlemen up here. And, say, whenever I ask you anything about sharks, you tell all you know. Remember those yarns you used to spin, about when you sailed in the Gulf?"

"Yas, suh. Yas, *suh*," grinned Joe. "I sho' does!"

"All right—make 'em terrible—make 'em awful! And, say, how big was that shark that old Captain Howard—"

Pearsall's voice trailed into a whisper, and Joe punctuated the subdued conversation by frequent noddings of the head and knowing grins. Colt and Tinman looked on curiously.

The coming of the crew of the Cliquot forbade further confidential talk. Smiley, the captain, sized things up at a glance and decided that he was expected to be the life of the party.

"Do you know, dear boys," said the skipper of the Cliquot, "it is a rare pleasure to be with you jolly Southerners, and our only regret is that you haven't any boats and don't know how to sail. It's too bad that we must run away with your famous cup to-morrow. But I shall be host to-morrow night, after the regatta. I invite you all to a party, here, to celebrate the victory of the Cliquot!"

"You're a real sport to feel that way about it," grunted Pearsall. "I always did like a generous winner. Fill 'em up again, Joe."

"No, no. Not just now," the visitor objected. "We boys can't afford to get stupid, you know, on the eve of the regatta. To-morrow night we may indulge more freely, and more joyously. Eh? Oh, well, if you insist—"

And so the conversation began to flow more generously.

"Splendid course you've got here," Smiley remarked. "Squalls bad?"

"Not specially at this season," replied Dave Colt. "The worst thing this time o' year is sharks."

"Sharks!" Smiley's eyes widened.

"Yep. Got to watch yourself. Bathing's dangerous, except in bathtubs and very shallow water, where the big uns can't get. And you got to watch yourself out sailing. Can't afford to fall overboard. Lots of 'em—these nasty-tempered tiger sharks. Alligators ain't so bad—just bite small pieces out of you; but sharks—ugh!"

"Yere," drawled Horace Pearsall. "Only drawback to sailing down in these parts."

"Oh, well!" The skipper of the Cliquot shrugged his shoulders. "I haven't read of any of you gentlemen being eaten alive recently. You're not trying to scare us, are you?"

"Of course not!" Pearsall laughed heartily. "Nobody's afraid of sharks, after he gets used to them. Our man, Wall-Eye Joe, here, will jump in the water and wrestle one, provided he's got his eight-inch belly-ripper along. Ain't that so, Joe?"

"Yas, suh," lied Wall-Eye Joe. "I used to do dat pretty nigh ev'y day when I was in sail, Mobile to Cuba, on de barkentine Stranger."

"Lots of sharks in the Gulf, eh?" encouraged Pearsall.

"Yas, suh."

"Did they ever bother you?"

"Me? Naw, suh. Not me. But dey was a man on dat ship dat sho was skeered of sharks. Seems like his whole family had been eaten up oncet when dey was shipwrecked, and dey had to put to sea in a open boat. Sharks jes' kept foll'in' along night and day, and reach up ev'y now an' den an' bite a piece out of somebody. By'n by dey wasn't nobody lef' of de family 'cept dis here feller—what *wuz* his name, Mr. Pearsall—you heard me call it, didn't you? Cap'n Scott Edenby—yas, suh, dat's de man."

"And what did he do, when you were sailing with him?" demanded Captain Smiley.

"Oh, he jes' set at de stern all day wid a high-power rifle, jes' a-lookin' for sharks, and a-shootin' and a-shootin'. Say, he gwine to kill all de sharks in de Gulf, so he make sure he'll kill de sharks what et up his family. Oncet in a while he 'ud get one, an' he 'ud jes' set up and roar somethin' terrible. De cap'n say he was crazy on de subject, but he jes' let him stay on, hopin' it would help his mind, suh. An' one day, when dey was a big school of sharks follin' de ship, we hears Cap'n Edenby jes' a-shootin' de whole magazine out of his rifle. Den he jump up and make de awfullest scream you ever hear, and jump overboard—right in de midst of dem tiger sharks. We seen him all bloody an' slashed an' tore to pieces by dem sharks, an' one of dem make off wid his head an' his right arm, an' two others fightin' over his legs! Yas, *suh!* Hit sho was terrible!"

"An—another drink, please," mumbled Captain Smiley. "I think I'm beginning to contract malaria, down in this beastly climate."

They all took another drink around.

"Yes, I remember Captain Edenby," said Pearsall. "He used to be quite a picturesque figure around the ship chandleries in Mobile."

Pearsall winked at Charley Tinman.

"You fellows have heard the story of that fin up there, haven't you?" Charley inquired. He pointed to a giant shark fin that hung in the shadows on the outer wall of the club house.

"Is—is that the kind of fins sharks have around here?" queried Smiley, examining the trophy.

Pearsall laughed.

"Oh, no, that belonged to a tropical shark—one of those big fellows, sixty or seventy feet long. What was the ship that brought it in, Charley? You remember, don't you?"

Tinman did some intensive thinking.

"Oh, yes, of course," he replied. "It was Captain Rennie Edson, of the American three-master Bluefields. I remember hearing him tell about it."

"Was he the man who presented the fin to the Yacht Club?"

"Yes, I believe he was. He and his family were passengers, guests of the captain, on a twenty-five-ton sloop from Belize to the Cayman Islands, when it happened. He said he was sitting in the cabin one night, when the ship was skimming along before a stiff breeze, and suddenly he heard the sails begin to flap. He was very much surprised, and went up on deck to see if the sloop was up in the wind, and why. The captain was at the wheel, and when Edson sang out to know what was wrong the captain gasped, 'My God, the devils have us!' They were moving along about eight knots an hour, right in the teeth of the wind, and the sails flapping. Edson ran to the wheel and put her hard over, but she didn't respond. The master was on his knees, praying. Edson ran forward, and in the light of a port lantern made out a strange black object clinging to the vessel's rail. He rushed below to get a lantern and an axe. The crew was in consternation. Edson ran up with his axe to the big, slimy, black thing hooked over the rail. It was the fin of an enormous shark that was trying to pull them under the sea. Edson struck, three times in quick succession, and part of the fin fell on the deck. A shark seventy feet long swam off, furiously lashing the water, and the sloop, taking the wind, spurted ahead. They saved the piece of fin, and here it is."

"You don't mean to tell me a shark would try to swamp a twenty-five-ton sloop?" challenged Smiley.

"Oh, yes," Tinman assured him, "especially when he's hungry. You see, they'll follow a ship for a hundred miles, hoping something will be thrown overboard, or somebody will fall overboard.

They ain't like porpoises—they won't eat trash. They want fresh meat—blood and bones."

"Well, it's too bad you fellows can't scare us," sneered Smiley, rising. "I think we'd better turn in for the night, shipmates."

They looked out over the harbor and saw the Cliquot riding peacefully at her buoy, all regulation lights displayed. The crew retired to their bunks in the Yacht Club dormitory.

A period of meager conversation ensued, and presently Pearsall called Wall-eye Joe aside for a conference. Others of the party caught a few snatches of the colloquy.

"Yas, suh, but how is I gwine to sail on de Cliquot?" they heard Wall-Eye Joe demand.

"That's just the point. You've got to sail on the Cliquot. To-morrow you'll be the only loose nigger around her that Smiley can get to take Hobson's place. Tell him you'll handle the tiller, or the mainsheet, or the jibsheet—anything so you can stay aft." He gave Joe more instructions, and the negro disappeared.

The harbor of Biloxi was astir at dawn with preparations for the annual regatta. Brilliant sunshine and a brisk wind from the Gulf foretold fine weather for the great event.

Captain Smiley and the crew of the Cliquot were abroad early, making distracted inquiries for the negro Hobson, who had not slept aboard the Cliquot at all. No one apparently had seen the Nova Scotia black, and Smiley begged the Yacht Club officials for a porter to go out and search for him.

Pearsall suggested that Wall-Eye Joe might know in what haunts to seek the truant, and Joe readily assented to the errand.

"Yas, suh," Joe promised. "I'll be sure to find him over at Gulfport in a blind tiger, suh, or maybe he's at Pass Christian. I sho will look hard for him, suh."

Joe departed hastily on his quest.

"There's plenty of good niggers around here who will be glad to sail with you," Pearsall told the master of the Cliquot.

"Yes, but Hobson is a real sailor, a deep-sea man who has shipped on lime juicers," replied Smiley, very much worried. "We'll need him badly in the regatta—though I don't suppose there are any sailors on your native boats that we need worry about, eh?"

"Oh, no," Pearsall agreed, ironically. "All amateurs, Captain—you can't lose!"

It was high time for the crew of the Wampus Cat to bestir themselves, if the stodgy-looking cruiser was to be converted into a racing craft. Pearsall took leave of Captain Smiley, and applied to the commodore of the Yacht Club for permission to enter his yacht, open sloop, forty feet.

Then Pearsall and his two companions sailed their boat across the harbor to a convenient sandy beach where they could anchor in shallow water, and began the work of transformation. Two hours later the cozy cabin of the Wampus Cat had vanished, every unnecessary article on the sloop had been removed and cached on the beach, and the boat rode a thousand pounds lighter, stripped to a mere cockpit where the "house" had been.

For the first time that season, Pearsall rigged his yacht with mainsail, topsail, balloon jib, flying jib and spinnaker, and the Wampus Cat spun back into harbor, saucily advertising herself as a racer that defied all challengers. She lacked the bronze trimmings and the mahogany eclat of the Cliquot, her sails were mud-stained and patched in places, and the lines of her hull distinctly rangy, but to the nautical eye she appeared not whollly impossible. The crew left her riding proudly at her buoy, and went ashore.

Noon came, and with it came Wall-Eye Joe, with a weary expression on his face. He found Pearsall and Smiley at

the Yacht Club, restlessly awaiting the hour for the great event.

"Ain't no sign o' dat coon," Joe reported. "Cain't 'magine where he could 'a' went."

"Oh, well," snapped Smiley, "find me a negro somewhere who knows how to sail, and can do the dirty work on the Cliquot. For one thing, I want him to go overboard and take a look at the rudder."

"You must be talkin' 'bout me, Boss," grinned Joe. "I sailed befo' de mast in de Gulf, suh, an' what I don't know about a yacht ain't worth tellin' suh."

"All right. You come out and show us what you can do. It won't take much effort to win this race, anyway. What class are you sailing in, Pearsall? Thirty-foot cat?"

"Cat your eye," retorted Pearsall. "Open sloop—your class."

"What—with that clumsy yawl?" Smiley laughed uproariously. "Why don't you knock off your jib and bowsprit, and enter her as a crippled cat? Then you might win something. Mercy, but you boys are amusing! There isn't a boat in your harbor that would be used as a mudscow up home."

A group of yachtsmen had gathered to hear the discussion, and Pearsall saw signs of heightening choler among the listeners.

"What would you say, Captain Smiley, if my boat—the one you called a yawl—should defeat the Cliquot?"

Smiley guffawed insolently.

"I'd lay you a thousand dollars to a dried mackerel, if I thought you were sport enough to bet."

"No, I won't bet," said Pearsall, "but if the Cliquot comes in first to-day I'll eat your port halyards!"

"Agreed," said Smiley, and abruptly terminated the interview. Wall-Eye Joe followed silently, as Smiley strutted out of the Yacht Club.

"Boys," choked Pearsall, "you-all may feel like lying down, but I'm in this race for blood. I'll give him my nigger Joe and sail the Wampus Cat with three men, and I hope you'll have a photographer to snap us coming in at the finish."

Wall-Eye Joe, aboard the Cliquot, was gloomily examining the sheets and halyards; he paid special attention to the tiller, and the stern of the yacht generally. It was a stern that sloped in abruptly, a distinguishing mark of construction that spelt speed. Joe went overboard to examine the rudder, and reported everything in perfect shape.

Long before two o'clock, the hour for the opening of the regatta, the harbor was crowded with sight-seeing boats, all gaily ablaze with flags. A band blared forth acceptable harmony from the gallery of the Yacht Club. A smart wind whipped the bay, and swept the sky clear save for a few patches of scudding down. It was distinctly a day of days for a yacht race.

The regatta opened. The Biloxi cats were off first, and raced down the bay like so many game cocks. The machine cats and model cats followed, two classes of smaller yawls, the model sloops, the machine sloops, and so through various classes to the capital class of the Cliquot, the Cricket, the Salamander, the Wampus Cat and the Petit Bois.

Pennants flying, the swanlike vessels bore down on the starter's boat. The Cliquot, flaunting a set of dazzling new sails and agleam with bronze rails and trimmings, spurted ahead of them all.

Wall-Eye Joe, entrusted with the mainsheet, waved sadly to the crew of the Wampus Cat as the New England sloop swept one length, two lengths, six lengths, ahead.

Joe's eyes rolled mournfully back to the broken field of Class I sloops that were jockeying for position in the rear of the Cliquot. His homesick gaze rested on the brown and mottled sails of the Wampus Cat, long-time champion of the Gulf Coast. All the sloops were going before the wind, with spinnakers belly-

ing out and every available inch of canvas put into play.

The course was eighteen miles—a triangle comprising three legs and marked off by three stakeboats. The first leg was merely a matter of dashing before the wind. The second and third would tell the tale, when it would be necessary to tack and run with the wind abeam.

"Well, do you think we'll finish last, my man?" inquired Captain Smiley.

Wall-Eye Joe grinned up at him deceitfully.

"You sho is got a reg'lar ship, suh. Seems like none o' dese Gulf Coasters kin ever ketch you, suh."

Smiley seated himself lazily aft and gazed scornfully at the four yachts that were bringing up the rear, the nearest of them nearly an eighth of a mile away.

The Cricket, which had taken second place at the start, had lost her lead, and the Wampus Cat had passed her .

"Wait till we have rounded the first stakeboat," Smiley boasted. "Then we'll show them some sailing."

As the Cliquot bore down upon the first stakeboat, there was delay in lowering the spinnaker. Smiley cursed. He wanted to blame Joe, but it was not Joe's fault. Joe was handling the mainsheet, and doing it cleverly.

The Cliquot negotiated the stakeboat clumsily—there was no gainsaying it—and Smiley lost a hundred yards of his lead as a penalty. He noted with dismay that the Wampus Cat rounded the boat expertly, without a moment's unnecessary loss of time.

Angrily taking the tiller, Smiley proceeded to sail as recklessly as he knew how, in order to make up his loss. The Cliquot tacked sharply to windward, the tip of her mainsail dipping water at frequent intervals, and her starboard gunwale awash. Every man on the yacht was drenched with spray.

Wall-Eye Joe saw the gap widening between the Cliquot and the Wampus Cat.

"You sho is takin' chances, Boss," he warned. "De squalls is mighty treacherous in dis bay, an' hit wouldn't take much of a puff to turn us over, suh."

"Shut up," snapped Smiley. "I know what I'm doing."

"But dey's sharks in dese waters, suh."

Captain Smiley glanced warily at the submerged starboard rail. True enough, an enterprising shark might venture close enough, he thought, to snatch a meal off the listing deck of the Cliquot.

"Seeing is believing," he grunted. "We'll worry about the sharks when they show up."

He handed over the tiller to Joe, and took the mainsheet himself.

"Ease her up a little," he ordered, with another glance at the water that was coming over the side. The Cliquot righted herself perceptibly. Smiley evidently was not inclined to take extreme chances.

The Wampus Cat, scudding fast four hundred yards behind the Cliquot, was sailing sharply into the wind, her deck at a sportsman's angle. Smiley saw that she was gaining.

"What's sharks to the Cliquot is sharks to the Wampus Cat," he muttered, and briskly ordered Joe to put her back on her course. He determined to maintain his advantage by close tacking.

A puff of wind careened the sloop over so that the boom splashed ominously in the water, but Smiley kept his nerve. He drew steadily away from the Wampus Cat, and on the leeward tack that followed he made equally good speed.

They were in sight of the second stakeboat, two-thirds over the course, when Wall-Eye Joe uttered a smothered exclamation of fright.

His eyes were glued on the surface of the bay, twenty feet back in the foaming wake of the Cliquot.

"What's the matter?" cried Smiley.

"Nothing, only I—"

He failed to finish the sentence, but watched the water intently.

"I thought I saw somethin'," he finished.

All eyes were directed nervously aft. Through the troubled surface of the water there protruded the fin of a big fish.

The Cliquot was still shipping water. One man of the crew had his foot submerged. He jerked it back into the safety zone of deck.

"Maybe it—it's a porpoise," suggested Captain Smiley.

"Naw, suh, hit ain't no porpoise."

"I guess you'd better ease her up!"

Wall-Eye Joe did as directed, and the slant of the Cliquot's deck was comfortingly reduced. Three hundred yards to the rear, the Wampus Cat was careening on, her prow hidden in spray. Evidently the Wampus Cat had not spoken a big fish.

The speed of the Cliquot was lessened. Smiley was studying the water with his glasses, but he saw nothing more of the fin.

For fifteen minutes the Cliquot sailed conservatively, and the Wampus Cat crawled up on her slowly.

"To hell with the sharks!" cried Captain Smiley, suddenly. "I don't believe it was one. We're not going to lose this race, even if we have to throw a nigger overboard to feed the beastly fish!"

Once more the Cliquot listed recklessly over to leeward, and clipped the edge off the zigzag course she was steering for the second stakeboat.

Wall-Eye Joe uttered a piercing yell of fear.

"God, Boss," cried the negro. "He's still foll'in' us! I seen his mouf yawnin'!"

The ugly nose of a shark, and a terrifying series of pointed teeth, glistened in the sunlight. This time there was no mistake!

Captain Smiley flashed out his automatic and fired eight shots in the direction of the ghastly creature. He could see that his shots went wild, for they splashed in the water many yards distant from the shark's head. All the ammunition on board had been expended in one futile volley.

"Ease her up!" shouted Smiley. "We can't run any risks with that beast lurking around. There may be a whole school of them!"

The Cliquot swerved far out of her course, until she was sailing almost on an even keel. With sails only partly filled, she was making reduced speed.

The Wampus Cat and the Cricket, not far behind her, were skimming over the waves, true to their course, as though nothing in the world mattered save to reach the stakeboat.

"The fools!" muttered Smiley, resuming his fascinated stare at the swirling water in the wake of the Cliquot. "They deserve to be eaten!"

The Cliquot tried a new tack in the general course toward the stakeboat, but Smiley was satisfied to sail modestly.

They watched in vain for the reappearance of the man-eater. The cunning monster seemed to draw near only when the yacht was listed to a dangerous angle.

"He prob'ly knows dere's no chance to grab one of us, long as we're sailing like dis," explained Wall-Eye Joe.

"But do you suppose he's still following us?" Smiley pressed him, frankly scared.

"No tellin', Boss. Sometimes dey follows you, and sometimes dey don't."

Smiley suffered agonies of chagrin when he watched the Wampus Cat round the second stakeboat, and the Cricket follow her at a hundred yards. They were too far ahead for the Cliquot to hope to overtake them.

A series of very conservative tacks brought Smiley's sloop to the end of the second leg of her unfortunate passage, just as the Salamander was drawing up. The Petit Bois was not far behind.

The shark that had haunted the Cliquot seemed permanently departed.

Smiley mopped his sunburned brow.

"Now, listen, men," he admonished. "Not a word about that shark! I'll murder you, nigger, if you mention it! Understand?"

"Yas, suh."

"It's just our hard luck that we were beaten. They outsailed us—that's all. See?"

Everybody saw.

"We'll make all the speed there is in her for the last leg, and perhaps we'll overtake the Cricket. I'm afraid that dirty scow, the Wampus Cat, has won the race. Sail like hell, boys!"

The Cliquot swept neatly around the stakeboat, and sped onward into the third and last lap of the race. Again she showed half of her bottom to the sea gulls. Again the end of her boom spanked the water, and all of her crew tasted brine. She had not made such speed at any time previously in the race.

And again Wall-Eye Joe pointed speechlessly to the spectacle in the wake of the Cliquot. Maintaining a maddening speed just equal to that of the yacht, the shark was following doggedly.

"God, but he's a vindictive scoundrel!" gasped Smiley. "He's just lagging along, waiting for one of us to go overboard, or for a chance to swim up alongside and grab one of us."

Wall-Eye Joe unsheathed a wicked knife, whose eight-inch blade glistened evilly in the sunlight.

"Dat's all right, Boss. Let him come on. I'll go in after him, dat's all!"

Smiley shuddered.

"You'll do nothing of the sort. We can't put up a race with that demon hounding us. Ease off the sails—quick!"

Again the Cliquot sailed hopelessly on an even keel, fatally off her course.

The Salamander, and even the Petit Bois, crept between Smiley's yacht and the finish.

Maddened by the sight, Smiley ordered a desperate spurt, shark or no shark.

The blunt nose and the diabolical open mouth persisted in the wake of the Cliquot. Smiley, in a cold sweat, tried to keep his eyes off the monster while they were running in. They managed to pass the Salamander, but three boats had beaten them. Whistles and fog-horns were splitting the air into blue ribbons in the vicinity of the Yacht Club, where the Wampus Cat had glided proudly in, a winner, and the Cricket had followed her at two hundred yards. Now the Petit Bois was nearing the end of the course.

As the Cliquot dashed furiously in at the finish, Captain Smiley, with a heavy iron pin in his hand, stood aft in a towering rage.

"Damn you!" he shrieked, hurling the pin through the air at the apparition that still swam on astern.

The missile shot far beyond the shark, but Smiley, with a scream of agony, lost his balance and fell overboard.

"Bring her about!" screamed Wall-Eye Joe, thrusting the tiller into another man's hands.

With a line in one hand and his glittering knife in his teeth, the negro went overboard after the skipper of the Cliquot. A gasp of horror convulsed the crew. As the boat came around the shark darted toward the figure of Captain Smiley.

Wall-Eye Joe, swimming lustily, reached Smiley with his line, and one of the men aboard the Cliquot hauled at it feverishly as Smiley grasped it. Then Joe took his knife in hand and swam fearlessly into the grinning teeth of the shark.

Blood suffused the water, and there was a sickening lather of pink foam at the spot where they saw the deadly blade rise four, five, six times into the air, and descend into the quivering mass with which Joe was struggling.

Somebody had cast anchor, and a rowboat was putting out from the Cliquot, which had stopped twenty feet away.

Wall-Eye Joe, his knife again in his teeth, was swimming toward the skiff. Naught save an eddy of reddish foam remained where the encounter had taken place. The shark had vanished.

Captain Smiley had swooned, and was being restored by copious ministrations of whiskey, aboard the Cliquot. He glanced up weakly as the hardy negro clambered aboard.

"Joe," he muttered, "you have saved my life. You shall be rewarded!"

The Cliquot sailed limply to her buoy in the harbor. The band at the Yacht Club was playing "It's a Long, Long Trail."

They heard somebody on the deck of a spectators' boat yell "Quitter!"

Night came. Again the glimmer of a thousand festive lamps trembled over the surface of the bay, and the air tinkled with merry string music.

The regatta ball was in progress at the Yacht Club, and a long intermission had been declared for the presentation of trophies.

The commodore of the Yacht Club, who was making the presentation speeches, started by awarding cups to the winners in the catboat classes, desiring evidently to work up to a grand climax.

When he came to the sloop division, he announced that the Wampus Cat, of Mobile, Captain Pearsall, had won the trophy for the forty-foot class, in which there were four entries.

The skipper of the Cliquot raised a hand in protest.

"Yes, I am coming to you," announced the commodore. "It was determined at the eleventh hour that, since there was but one entry in the forty-five-foot class, a separate trophy should be awarded. I take pleasure in presenting the cup for this class to the champion sloop Cliquot, of Boston, Captain Smiley. You sailed a notable race, Captain Smiley, and I congratulate you!"

A titter ran through the audience.

Smiley turned on his heel and strode abruptly out of the ballroom, refusing his trophy.

A half hour later, the stags on the forward decks of the floor above the dance hall saw the red and green lamps of the sloop Cliquot moving slowly out of the harbor.

"Dam'f he ain't leaving to-night," chuckled Horace Pearsall, skipper of the Wampus Cat. "Joe, serve us another drink."

"That Boston fellow never did intend giving us a party, anyway," grumbled Charley Tinman. "What did he give you for saving his life, Joe?"

Wall-Eye Joe snickered.

"He say he was gwine to give me fifty dollars, Boss, but he 'parently is gone and forgot hit."

"Well, how in the name of Mud did you pull it?" demanded Dave Colt. "I'm tired of this dam' secrecy."

"You tell 'em, Joe," ordered Horace Pearsall.

"Well, suh"—Joe shuffled his feet modestly—"you see, dere was de carcass of dat eight-foot shark dat Captain Howard caught de other day when he was out for tarpon outside the bar, and give to me to taxiderm. I taxidermed him wid a pig's bladder in his mouf and a weight in his insides, suh, and hid him under de stern of de Cliquot last night. Den I trolled him out with tarpon lines to-day when nobody was noticin'. You can't see a tarpon line in de water, you know, Boss. He did'nt 'pear on de surface 'cept when de boat was going fast, suh, 'cause when we slowed down and sailed on a even keel he was floatin' under de water, and de lines never was showing—you know how trollin's done, Boss. When I jumped in and fit him, suh, I cut de lines and let him sink. Well, suh—"

"But the blood! How did you get blood out of a dead shark?"

"De pig's bladder in his mouf, suh, was full o' chicken blood."

THE SNOWBALL OF SCANDAL

By CLAY PERRY

Entered in the BLACK CAT *Short-Story Contest*

LINGHAM was shaving in the tiny bathroom which adjoined his rooms at the Beech Tree Inn, when the cadences of a song came floating up to him. It was a plaintive melody, but, sung by a voice of thrushlike soprano, it was lifted from plaintiveness into cheerful allegro in the sweet June breeze that carried it to Lingham's ears, through the window where he stood:

"Dear little rose with your heart of gold,
Dear little rose, may your petals fold,
My secret sweet, I will trust you to keep,
Deep in my heart 'twill repose—"

He located the source of the song, but could not see the singer. He did manage to gouge himself on the chin with his safety razor as he endeavored to look in and around the mirror, in the window, at the same time.

Lingham had heard the lyric sung by McCormick, and had believed that none but the Irish tenor could really sing it. This morning, at the expense of a hacked chin and bated breath, Lingham discovered his mistake.

There was a girl, somewhere in the little garden of the place adjoining the Inn grounds, at the rear, who was doing much better than McCormack. McCormack, after all, is only a man with a voice, and this girl was, possibly, young and pretty. She had a golden soprano, and she was singing, with unconscious abandon, under the window of a lonely young man on a Sabbath morning in June. The garden where she sang belonged to the white house with green blinds which faced away from the Inn on another street. The place belonged to Fredericks, the contractor, Lingham happened to know. Lingham, whose design for the Hillaston Memorial Temple, fashioned on pure Colonial lines, had been accepted by the committee, did not think much of Fredericks's glaringly new and "restored" Colonial house; this despite the fact that Fredericks had the contract to build the Temple from Lingham's design.

Fredericks had shamefully stuck a pergola onto the south side of his house, and the pergola, finding itself cramped in the tiny garden which was snubbed short by the high board fence that bounded the domain of the Inn, made an abrupt loop. The result was that it appeared as if it had started for the fence, then dodged and turned itself into a surprised-looking "J" when it found itself facing the white house again. Not even the thin disguise of a Dutchman's Pipe vine made the atrocity any the less grotesque.

The voice of the girl who was singing "The Heart of a Rose" came from the crook of the "J." Lingham managed, at last, to catch a flash of something like dull copper through the leaves. Then he got his second cut on the chin, for he opened his mouth and exclaimed, "Titian hair!" Mrs. Fredericks was a brunette. She must have a visitor.

At the breakfast table, Lingham overheard a discussion of the singer. There were several boarders at the Inn who were fixtures. Lord knows how long they had been there. They would never have told you, themselves; they were of

that age when mention of any considerable stretch of years is something of a personal affront. Lingham had to hide his smile in the coffee cup when Miss Susan Barker remarked to her vis-à-vis, Miss Harriet Galt, with a sibilancy of sentence that was emphasized by Miss Susan's too even, too white teeth: "She calls herself *Susie* Ayres! It's just like that sort of person to be singing such a song, outdoors, on Sunday."

The venom of Miss Susan's sputter appeared to be inspired by the fact that the singer used the diminutive form of her own respectable name. Susan was, and is, eminently respectable. Susie? Well, there was more behind Miss Susan's remark than appeared, but Lingham did not know it. He was a newcomer to Hillaston. Furthermore, he had no idea who Susie Ayres was. But, happily, he had a conference scheduled with Fredericks for that afternoon at the latter's house.

As soon as he was introduced to her, Lingham felt that she was just the sort of person to stimulate comment of the sibilant Susan sort. She tempted comment. Aside from that, she was a cousin of Mrs. Fredericks's and she had come to Hillaston to spend the summer.

Lingham had yet to learn that in Hillaston comment invariably means gossip. Hillaston was strange to Lingham, new to him, though it had been a civilized settlement for three times as long as any town or city in which he had ever lived. He was from the raw West. Hillaston intrigued him; it was a beautiful New England town. In its older houses he was delighted to discover certain original counterparts of the Colonial lines he had incorporated in his design for the Memorial Temple. Fredericks's house was not one of the buildings thus distinguished, but Fredericks did not even claim so; he had built the house because it was the businesslike thing for a contractor to do, rather than to buy a home, ready-made.

Lingham was anxious to penetrate to the core of the town. He resolved to like Hillaston, not only superficially, but intimately. He had made the acquaintance of a few delightful persons, among them the Fredericks. They were new to Hillaston, however; they had lived there but ten or twelve years. Another was Hallock, an elderly bachelor, one of the three judges who had awarded Lingham the prize for his design. Hallock was an old-timer; but, somehow, he was not *of* Hillaston, although he was *in* it. Lingham felt this distinction.

Withers, another young architect, was one of the judges, too. Withers had been away at the time of the contest, but had returned just in time to take the place of the late General Hawes, original chairman of the trio. It was Withers who took Lingham in tow, put him up at the City Club, and took him to the Country Club, showed him around, and introduced him to Hallock. Lingham had decided he would get acquainted as fast as he could. He intended to follow up his lead in Hillaston by establishing an office there.

At first glance, Lingham knew that it was going to be easy for him to get acquainted with Susie Ayres.

"Yes, I've had the pleasure of hearing you sing," he said, when they were introduced.

She threw back her head and laughed as musically as she had sung. "Then you live at Beech Tree Inn," she replied, "and I'm going to make it a point to sing under your window every Sunday."

"Make it every day," suggested Lingham.

"Only Sundays, because it will make the tabbies so cattish," she went on. "I saw three of them arching their backs and spitting at me, from the side piazza, this morning."

Lingham chuckled and repeated to her Miss Susan Barker's remark, without giving her name, of course, except to say that it was "Susan, not Susie."

After that, Lingham's acquaintance

with Susie Ayres grew, delightfully. He continued to be much amused at the "tabby-cat" remarks he heard about her at the Inn. He rather liked to hear Miss Susan Barker speak of Susie Ayres as "that sort of person," because it was nice to have secrets with "that sort of person." Susie Ayres, with her copper-colored hair, milk-white skin, freckled just enough to suggest her love of out-of-doors, her slim grace and her voice, began to become something a bit more than a cousin of Mrs. Fredericks's to Lingham. She had a certain abandonment of manner; a certain humorous glint in her eyes, a certain tremor in her laugh that thrilled him.

At this point came the bolt from the blue. Withers hurled it, Withers, the matter-of-fact, who played tennis with Lingham at the Country Club as if it were part of the business of living, not a recreation, and who made it his business, likewise, rather than a social grace, to present Lingham to the men who counted in Hillaston.

Lingham had come to know Withers well enough to talk with him, frankly, about the little things of daily life, and he remarked, one afternoon, between sets of tennis, that it was odd the Fredericks were never able to induce Miss Ayres to come out to the club.

"Odd!" exclaimed Withers, with a peculiar smile. "Oh, I don't know. Hillaston is awfully exclusive and—well, careful would be a better word, perhaps."

Lingham laughed. He was beginning to understand Hillaston and its provincial social rules. He could not help thinking of Miss Susan Barker and her sibilances as typical of Hillaston society. He told Withers of Miss Susan's remark about Susie Ayres. But Withers did not laugh. His face became stern, and he said:

"Well, I'm sorry it's got to those women. They're going to keep on talking about it—about her. And that's a shame. Lord knows, it's hard enough for a girl, under such a handicap, without—"

He shrugged and, for the first time since Langham had known him, looked helpless.

"Handicap?" queried Lingham, puzzled. "It strikes me that Miss Ayres has all the advantages, brains, voice, beauty and, well, personality."

Withers fumbled with the tennis racket he held and dropped it. "Lingham, I hate gossip," he said, with serious vehemence. "It has spoiled the chances of many a good man and the life of many a good woman. But, you're sure to hear this, somewhere, because the women are gossiping already. It's better you should have it straight. Of course, I realize that your being hooked up with Fredericks makes it awkward for you to know such things. You can't help *thinking* about it, no matter how little you really care. It's her parentage, Lingham. She—"

Withers broke off awkwardly and pounded the turf with the handle of his racket in a boyish, embarrassed manner.

"I wouldn't say a word," he declared. "I hate gossip, but I'm absolutely sure of this. It *isn't* gossip."

"Yes," said Lingham, "go on."

Withers got it out, awkwardly, but plainly enough. "Susie Ayres has no legal right to her—to that name. It was not her father's name. In fact, she doesn't know—"

"That's enough—that's enough!" broke in Lingham, not angrily, but with a sober finality of tone that closed Wither's mouth tightly. "If I ever want to know any more," Lingham said, "it would be better sense for me to get it, straight, from her, wouldn't it? I mean, if it ever came to the point where I wanted to know, where I *had* to know, and she wanted to tell me, or anyone."

Withers gave Lingham a searching look. "But, good Lord, man!" he exploded, "I didn't even think you were—interested."

"Oh, I'm not," lied Lingham.

They went on with their game, and Withers beat Lingham so badly that Lingham invented a strained ligament in his serving wrist to excuse his being so much off his game. Driving back to town, Withers had his final say:

"I hate gossip, as I told you," he argued, painstakingly. "I've always hated it, because I was brought up on it. To my mind, there is nothing more destructive of civilized human society than a pack of gossips, women or men. Men do gossip, but they don't keep everlastingly at it, pecking away, as women do. Men say it once, then quit. At least that's my idea of it. I suppose a fellow feels sort of guilty for having passed it on, at all. But this information—"

"If it is information," put in Lingham, dully.

"Well, it is," Withers declared. "I'm sorry to say it. My authority—well, I'd trust it as the evidence of my own voice, speaking the words."

Lingham could not doubt him. And he was hit rather hard. The sweetness and smiles, the airy grace and the frank companionship and the ethereal womanliness that shone through it all, in Susie Ayres, were besmirched and, in the light of what Withers had last said, Lingham was conscious that he was more than interested. An emotion, dispassionate but steadfast, was surging in him, and it took the shape of a desire to shield her from this gossip.

The gossip at the Inn, at which he had laughed, took on a sinister significance now. Lingham was stabbed to the quick to realize what the tabbies must have meant with the phrase "that sort of person," and he was furious with himself, now, for having so laughingly passed it on to Susie Ayres. How bravely she had met it! How it must have cut into her heart!

Lingham went to his room, after supper that evening, and sat by the window, overlooking the Fredericks' absurd little garden. The Dutchman's Pipe, by this time, had succeeded in smoking up a cloud of leaves which buried the angles of the "J" and it was really beautiful in the dusk. Lingham gazed at it for a long time, thoughtfully, then he rose, quiet and decided. He had the look of one who has found peace after strife with himself. He went over to the pergola and found Susie Ayres sitting there, crochetting.

Lingham's emotion as he left his rooms and went across the yard of the Inn to a narrow gate in the fence that opened into the garden, had been of almost unbearable pity for the girl.

But when he faced her and she smiled up at him in the dim glow of moonlight, filtered through the leaves of the arbor, his pity was dissolved into a yearning, tender passion. She was in a gown of green, a lighter tint of the leaves of the vine against which her bright head gleamed.

The shrill voice of one of the Fredericks children, an impish little girl, floated out from an open window of a second floor chamber.

"Oh, daddy, you didn't kiss me good night!"

"She's a wicked little imp but she loves her daddy so much," observed Susie Ayres.

Lingham was unable to speak. He sat down beside her and took her hands in his and held them so tightly that her eyes closed with the pain of it, but she did not make any complaint.

"I have just discovered how much I love you," he said. "I love you more than anything in the world and I want you to marry me. I had to come and tell you."

She did not draw her hands away; she held them still, but without an answering pressure and the cadences of her voice brought agonies of tenderness to Lingham as she replied, "But you do not know anything about me."

"I know more than you think," he

blurted out, then he added, "but I want only to know what you wish to tell me. It is enough for me that you are here and that I love you."

She managed to disengage her hands without actually pulling them away from him; it was her way with everything, to be completely mistress of herself, without seeming to strive for it. She was fingering her crochetting when she spoke again:

"There is not much I can tell you, then," she said, "and I think perhaps it would be better for you to wait until you find out for yourself—much better."

Lingham's impetuousness was restrained by the delicate barrier she had erected between them; he was unable to push past it.

"But you know nothing of me, either," he cried. He was aware that his argument fell flat, even before her slow smile came and she said:

"You are the man of the hour and a man has nothing to explain—while a woman—"

He was stirred by the touch of shy pride that crept into her voice and he winced at the sigh that came from her lips as she ended her sentence, abruptly.

She shook her head, with the sigh. A strand of her hair became tangled in the vine at her back and she leaned away from him to disentangle it. Lingham set his lips against the rush of emotion that gripped him as he looked upon the delicate white column of her throat, so soft and slender, yet holding such melody within it.

"Then you do care for me!" he insisted, desperately.

She rose and, touching his arm with the tips of her fingers and poised as if for flight, she half whispered:

"More than I must admit, I am afraid." Then she fled to the house.

Lingham retraced his steps to the Inn nursing the bitter-sweet image of her. He blamed himself, at the first, because he had not roughly taken her in his arms, loosed his emotion, held her until she gave herself to him. He felt that she would have done so. But he realized, later, that they both would have regretted it, he most of all. It would have been taking ruthless advantage of her, violating that delicate something which guarded her even against what might be her own desire.

Bitterly he regretted the unwelcome knowledge that Withers had imparted to him. Yes, Withers knew what he was saying when he told him that he would be "always thinking of it." Worse than that; *she* would be thinking of it always and it would erect a conventional barrier between them that not even love could break down completely. Love, itself, would invoke, forever, the memory of the injustice that another careless love had forced upon her, an injustice born with her, something she could not help, nor forget.

Lingham would have been more than happy to take her, nameless, a woman without parentage, knowing nothing of her save that she was his woman of women. But Hillaston had already imposed upon Lingham something of its acid test. He was obliged to look through the semi-opaque glass of convention. So, he realized that they could not live in Hillaston, happily, and that neither of them would flee from Hillaston.

Lingham rebelled against the constricting conventional bonds that made all these things true, but he knew it was useless to do so. He would continue to love her; that he knew only too well, but here was something against which the gentle god of love would only batter out his heart, this stone wall of convention. Lingham, who had so much wanted to like Hillaston began to hate it.

In his misery, Lingham was reluctant to keep the appointment at the City Club with Hallock that evening. But, after a time, he decided that Hallock would do him good. Hallock was not of Hillaston. So he took his newly completed sketch

of the elevation of the façade of the Memorial Temple, as he had promised, and went to the club.

Hallock appeared to notice Lingham's preoccupation as the architect unfolded his drawing in the card room of the club. Drawing his scholarly brows into a thoughtful frown, Hallock brushed the sketch aside, without looking at it and remarked, with blunt kindness:

"There is something troubling you, my friend, and you are not interested in your own work. Is there anything I can do; financial or otherwise?"

Lingham shook his head, tried to smile, but was unable to repress a burst of self-condemnation which, he thought, would be ambiguous to Hallock, for he did not intend to seek consolation.

"I'm disgusted with myself, that's all," said Lingham. "I had imagined that I was not a creature of convention, and I have just discovered that I am."

"Oh, yes," smiled Hallock. "And so useless to feel resentful, because that is something none of us can fight, very successfully, unless we simply don't care."

"That's it!" exclaimed Lingham, then looked up with astonishment, for Hallock's tone, his words and his smile appeared, each of them, to hold a hint of knowledge and sympathy, as if he knew.

"You would not believe that a man, flushed with his first professional success, would crumple up under the breath of gossip, even if the gossip happened to be the truth, would you?" Lingham appealed, with a feeling that he was going too far, but helpless to stop.

Hallock had such a quiet, unspoken sort of sympathy. He invited confidence. Lingham had been keenly aware of the delightful ease with which he had first become acquainted with Hallock and the swiftness with which he had grown to count him as an intimate friend.

"True gossip!" mused Hallock. "Hum! That's a paradox, indeed."

"Oh, I know that gossip does twist the truth, but where there is smoke—"

"There must be some fire," finished Hallock, smiling; "but fire does not always have the same color of flame."

"It was a warning, given me by a friend," went on Lingham, "and I have just had a sort of unspoken confirmation of its truth."

"So you've crumbled up under the snowball of scandal," remarked Hallock, grasping at another metaphor, idly, and appearing to ignore Lingham's last statement. "Scandal is very much like wet snow. It sticks where it falls and dampens enthusiasm and extinguishes the fires of friendship and drowns love. It gathers itself into enormous, crushing size as it rolls, like a snowball, down hill. Yet it melts and dissolves and trickles away under the rays of the sun of truth."

"It doesn't hit *me*," exclaimed Lingham, wretchedly. "It concerns a woman," he added. "A man could shed it, like a duck sheds water—to anticipate your metaphorical melting—but a woman—"

He came out with the whole story, then. He was desperately in need of counsel. Hallock was his only human source of moral inspiration in Hillaston. Lingham named Withers as his source of "warning information," but he left the lady nameless.

"And you told her, yourself, it would make no difference," remarked Hallock, at the end; "but you found that you had lied, that it did make a difference?"

"I didn't count on her, you see," replied Lingham, dejectedly. "Not that she even intimated it would make any difference—nor did I even mention it—but she made me feel *her* attitude. You see, I asked her to marry me, and that is a conventional bond, itself, marriage. No matter how bravely we both might despise convention, we would volunteer to take the yoke, and I can't ask her to make that sacrifice."

Hallock, quite abruptly, in a peculiar manner he had of lifting a conversation away from one subject to another, remarked:

"I have been much interested in telepathy, lately. I want to know whether there is any such thing. I have come to the point where I am so deeply interested that I want to be able to believe or disbelieve, and the only way I can see to convince myself one way or the other is by an actual test. The first step, to my notion, would be to try out the fallibility of the human mind in conveying a simple message by word of mouth, from one to the other. Your case offers an interesting experiment."

Hallock arose, abruptly, as a figure passed the door of the card room. "There is one of my prospective victims, now," he said. "I have arranged for a sort of seance, with five men to help me out, and I want you to be the sixth, Lingham."

"Why, yes, of course," muttered Lingham, politely, but much mystified by Hallock's freakish shift. It was either a very transparent attempt to take his mind off his troubles or else an extremely cold-blooded attempt to use him in his trouble as the subject for an experiment.

Hallock went out into the lobby and returned, shortly, with his other "victims." Lingham became doubly uneasy when he saw that Withers was one of them and Fredericks another. He would have bolted, then and there, but for Hallock's hypnotic manner of taking charge of his group. He asked the sextet to take seats in some chairs lined along the wall of the card room. The chairs were separated by the length of a man's forearm from each other. Hallock guided Lingham into the first chair and placed Braddock, a physician, next to him. In the third chair he placed Gresham, a newspaperman; in the fourth, Fredericks; fifth, Rexford, a lawyer, and at the end of the line, Withers.

Lingham began to feel resentful, apprehensive, but his curiosity became dominant. He trusted Hallock, after all, and surely Hallock would not publicly embarrass him with a direct reference to—

"The elementary class in thought transference," chuckled Hallock. "Professor Hallock in the chair."

"Where's ouija?" demanded Withers. The laugh he got dissolved the awkward stiffness that had gripped the group into an attitude of amused expectancy.

"I have typed on this sheet of paper a sentence," said Hallock, producing the sheet from his pocket, "a simple statement of fact—or, at any rate, I shall ask you to accept it as fact. I want you, gentlemen, to transfer it from one to another, so that the *thought* of it shall be reported accurately. I do not insist on preserving the exact words, but I want the thought accurately conveyed through your minds, lips and ears. It is a simple test, gentlemen, but I'm sure you won't resent it, if I tell you I'm practically certain you can't do it. Some of you have had experience with the—ah—intelligence test?"

A ripple of laughter greeted his sally. It was a favorite club joke, about the intelligence test. As their smiles died, Gresham, the editor, looked cynically convinced of the probability of Hallock's statement that they probably would fail on this test. Rexford, the lawyer, pursed his lips and shot side glances at his companions.

"The first man in the line, Mr. Lingham, is to see the printed sentence," Hallock went on. "He may memorize it, if he wishes. He will repeat it to you, Dr. Braddock, so that none but you shall hear. You will repeat it to Mr. Fredericks and so on down the line. Mr. Withers, when the message reaches you, you will please write it down just as you get it and pass the result to me."

Fredericks grunted. "The old game of gossip," he said.

Hallock merely scowled them into silence and continued: "Now, gentlemen, I have no reason to doubt your intelligence, veracity and ability to transmit a simple statement with entire accuracy—up to the limit of your inherent or

cultivated capacity. But I doubt the capacity of the normal mind. The purpose of this test is merely to establish, for my personal benefit, the possibility of thought transference in coherent form without the aid of the spoken word. Telepathically."

Dr. Braddock looked interested for the first time.

"Now, Mr. Lingham," said Hallock, and handed the typed slip to Lingham. He read it, slowly and carefully, and with considerable relief repeated the words to himself and, to make assurance doubly sure, he read it again.

"You have memorized it?" asked Hallock.

"Yes," was Lingham's reply, in a tone that rang sharp, for he was convinced, now, of what lay behind this "telepathy test." It held a deep significance for him.

"Then repeat it, carefully, in the ear of Dr. Braddock," prompted Hallock.

Braddock leaned toward Lingham and listened as the latter repeated the sentence in his ear.

"Take your time to assimilate the meaning," observed Hallock, "then to Mr. Fredericks."

Braddock hesitated, just an instant, nodded, then gave it to Fredericks. And so it passed on. As it came to Withers he wrote on a pad, scanned it, nodded in apparent satisfaction and handed the pad to Hallock.

Hallock glanced at the written message. "The original—exactly reversed," he said, with a smile.

There was a chorus of demands to know the original and the final versions, but Hallock shook his head vigorously.

"No, no, please do not insist," he cried. "That would be in the nature of an unkind exposure of one or more of you, gentlemen. This test was, as I said, for my personal benefit. I cannot agree to make anyone feel embarrassed. And, personally, I prefer not to know the weakest link in the chain. It would complicate my conclusion."

"Now that I think it over," declared Dr. Braddock, frankly, "I don't believe I even bothered with the thought of the sentence; I tried to transmit it, word for word."

Fredericks seconded the confession, and the rest began interjecting remarks. Hallock put his hands over his ears and then waved them out of the room, laughing. "Leave my laboratory, molecules, and fight it out in the billiard room."

But Hallock nodded to Lingham to remain. Lingham busied himself with his sketch sheets. He looked up, once, and saw Withers, passing out the door, with a thoughtful expression on his face.

"I want you to see the final version," said Hallock, and he spread out the typewritten sheet on the table and, beneath it, the sheet on which Withers had written.

"Absurdly simple," he chuckled. "Now, who would believe that six intelligent men would so distort the truth? You might think it possible if they were—um—"

"Women," supplied Lingham, with a catch in his laugh.

"Perhaps. Now, you see, here is the original sentence that I gave you:

"'Mr. James K. Larchner, of 37 Hamel Street, was seen entering the home of Leonard J. Kramer, of 52 Leman Avenue, last night, with the woman who is his wife.'"

"Yes, that is exactly as I gave it to Dr. Braddock," observed Lingham. "I am sure of that."

"Yes, I expected you would. It usually works that way—the first man gets it right—"

"You've tried this before?" exclaimed Lingham, sharply.

Hallock smiled. "Yes, but never with such a striking reversal of the original. You see, I put into the sentence an ambiguity, and the names of the streets were intended to confuse the careless mind—the normal, intelligent mind—so that the final version reads:

"'Mr. James K. Larchner, of 52 Hamel Avenue, was seen entering the home of Leonard J. Kramer, of 73 Leman Street, last night, with *Kramer's wife.*'

"The big reversion of thought, of course, lies in the libeling of the lady. It was his, Larchner's own wife, in the original, and she becomes Kramer's wife in the revised version."

"Why, it looks almost as if one of them had deliberately twisted it!" exclaimed Lingham.

"No," smiled Hallock, "that would suppose maliciousness, and I purposely chose names of persons and streets that do not exist. I do suspect that Gresham, with his editorial nose for ambiguities, would or might have tried to iron out that apparent ambiguity, inserting 'Kramer' for 'his,' and, so, the thought became reversed. But that is not important. The significance of the test, to me, is the absolute proof that the fallibility of the human mind makes telepathy impossible. What do you think, Lingham?"

"Gossip creates scandal," muttered Lingham.

Hallock sauntered out, leaving Lingham to gather up his sketches, fumbingly, and to depart alone, thinking hard.

It was not late, a trifle after nine o'clock, when Lingham reached his rooms. He dropped into a chair which had, of late, become his favorite seat, near the window that overlooked the vine-clad pergola.

There were lights in Fredericks's house, softly shaded, and in their glow were limned the dark outlines of the leafy arbor, so that it seemed to be detached from the house itself. Lingham sat in a sort of daze, he did not know how long, until there crept into his consciousness the thin thread of a softly sung melody:

"No one will know what your leaves conceal,
No one will guess what they could reveal—"

There was a crooning, half-sobbing quality to the voice. For a moment Lingham was seized with the wild hope that she—but he had not turned on his lights, at all, he reflected, and she was unconscious of his nearness. Yet, the song that floated up to him seemed to erect a palpitant and palpable bridge between them. As in a sleep-walking dream, he found himself going down the stairs, out the front door and around the Inn toward the gate in the fence.

Her voice sank to a quivering sigh in her throat as he surprised her there, alone in the half-gloom of the arbor.

"I came back," he said, in a low tone. "I came back to tell you that I cannot give you up, that way. You do care for me. You let me see it, yet I understand that you could not bear to have me insist. And I must insist. There is nothing that I know, nothing that I could ever learn or hear that would mean more to me than this—that I love you. Would it be too great a sacrifice for you to marry me—anyway?"

"No," she breathed, "not for me."

He went close to her and she looked up at him with eyes that were like dark pools. "Oh, but I am—I *was* afraid it would be, for you."

"And now?"

"I am very sure that you love me," she said softly, and rose to meet his outstretched arms.

"You see," she murmured, a little later, her voice tremulous with the emotion that had transformed her into a woman of soft, warming fire in his clasp, "you see, I did not know how much you knew of me. I was afraid that you did not know—enough. I feared you would regret, afterwards, when you found that you had created a pauper when you married me."

"Created— I don't understand at all!" exclaimed Lingham.

She laughed softly. "Then you must go on over to the Inn. Mr. Withers has something to tell you. He was here, and

he made a strange sort of apology to me. He said that he had been guilty of—of gossiping, and had told you something about me. He said he was up at the club, where you were, and you went before he realized. I wonder why he thought to find you here? He told me—"

"Withers!" exploded Lingham. "What did he tell you?"

She laughed a delicious little trill of mirth. "Nothing, after all," she said, "except what I have said, just now, and he will be lying in wait for you at the Inn. He seemed to be sure that you might come here—"

"He might be!" ejaculated Lingham, but he was puzzled still. "Why, I never thought of you as a potential pauper—or a princess, either, except that you are princess of my heart. What is it you are trying to tell me?"

"I—I promised not to tell," she stammered; "Mr. Withers was so anxious to have the privilege of correcting his social error of gossiping. You must let him."

"Oh, it doesn't matter at all!" declared Lingham, suddenly laughing, intoxicated with her nearness, and he proceeded to prove that it did not matter.

He found Withers, nearly an hour later, waiting for him, anxiously, abjectly, in the little parlor of the Inn.

"Lingham!" he burst out, explosively, "I've been cursing and kicking myself all over town since I—since that fiendish telepathy test of Hallock's set me thinking. And I went after the original version of that—information!" He broke off, bitterly, on the word. "I got it straight," he said.

Withers was damp with perspiration, from forehead to palms. He was terribly agitated.

"Like a fool," he went on, "I blundered into Fredericks's house and found you were not there, but she was, and I had to blunder out again, but—"

"Yes, Miss Ayres told me you had been there and you had a message for me," said Lingham, soothingly. "I've been thinking, too, since that experiment of Hallock's," he added, smiling.

"Listen, man!" commanded Withers, grasping Lingham by the arm with a convulsive hand and peering into his face anxiously, guiltily. "The original version of that damned gossip that I spread about Miss Ayres was this—I traced it, and it came through just three persons, not six: It was, that *'Miss Ayres never knew her parents,'* because they both died before she was one year old!"

Wither's agonized expression was comment enough on the twisted version he had given Lingham at the Country Club.

"But there's more to it," Withers continued. "She was left a fortune, in trust; and this *is* a fact, because I saw it in black and white to-night—the fortune goes to charity if she marries."

"Oh, is that all?" smiled Lingham, absently. "Well, don't be too hard on yourself, old man. It doesn't make any difference to me or to Susie Ayres—that, or the gossip, either."

ABEL GOD

By WILLIAM C. LENGEL

Entered in the BLACK CAT *Short-Story Contest*

HE had entered the editorial rooms of the Chronicle silently, and stood, towering, over the desk of Burton Price, the city editor. It was a few moments before anyone observed him. He wore no hat; thick, brownish-black hair fell heavily over his shoulders. His face was covered with a luxuriant beard; his eyes were blue-gray, troubled, introspective.

A loose, sombre-colored garment covered his magnificent frame. On his feet were sandals.

No less startling than his appearance was his salutation:

"I am Abel God!"

Someone in the room began to snicker, but thought better of it.

"I am going to preach in your city for several days," he said.

"I see," said Price, "and you want the Chronicle to say something about it."

"Yes," he said. "I would like your people to know. With my little band of disciples I will hold meetings at three in the afternoon, and at eight in the evening, in front of your City Hall."

From a fold of his ample garment he produced a photograph. It was of the sort of print that photographers make up by the hundred for actors and other people in public life. He placed it on Mr. Price's desk and, turning, left the room as noiselessly as he had entered.

Burton Price tapped his head significantly, and everyone in the room laughed. It released the tension. The stranger's presence had created an uncanny atmosphere.

Price called to a young reporter who was picking away idly at the keys of his typewriter: "Ewing, chase Abel to his lair; get a story of his private life; see what sorts of stunts he pulls off at his meetings. You'll probably find him in one of the North-End ten-cent rooming houses."

In this sordid section of the city, Everett Ewing found Abel God a half-hour later. He had stopped at a vegetable stand at the public market and was buying some carrots, onions, tomatoes and a head of new cabbage. It was one of those enervating days of early Spring, the sun beating down with a joyful vengeance. A crowd of unwashed urchins, barefooted for the first time that year, danced around Abel God, making faces at him behind his back, and throwing decayed vegetables, picked up from the gutter, in his direction.

"Damn little brats!" thought Ewing, but the object of their abuse, aware of their presence and their conduct, did not seem to mind. He turned and smiled on them benignly, picked up his purchases, and proceeded on his way. The crowd of children danced around him, the bolder of them snatching at his robe. He entered the market-house, and the watchman at the door halted his tormentors.

Ewing saw him go to a stall where meats were sold, and buy a quantity of cheap stewing beef. He then left the market by another door and walked in the direction of the river. Ewing followed him down the unkempt street, across a labyrinth of railroad tracks, and over a stretch of swampy reclaimed land. He disappeared around a bend. When

Ewing arrived at that point, he discovered the abiding place of Abel God, and his faithful followers. A large, roughly-constructed and unpainted houseboat was anchored in a cove. The boat fitted so snugly in the small bay that it seemed to be on the land itself. Abel nodded to a slatternly-looking woman who was pinning some clothes on a line stretched from the boat to a tree on shore, as he disappeared into the boathouse. Two overgrown boys were gathering driftwood along the shore, and seated on the deck was a young girl peeling potatoes.

He wondered if she could be a daughter of Abel God. As he picked his way across the marshy ground, the beachcombers watched him curiously, and so did the girl. Visitors, evidently were not the rule.

"What do you want?" demanded the girl.

"I am a newspaper man and—"

"Father!" called the girl, before Ewing could finish his sentence. She *was* the old man's daughter, then, concluded Ewing.

Abel God same out of the cabin where he had been preparing the meat and vegetables for their dinner.

"Welcome, friend," he greeted, but Ewing seemed to detect a note of uneasiness in his voice. "Come aboard; you are the first pilgrim, and you shall sit at table with us."

Ewing climbed into the boat, and as he followed the old man into the cabin, he felt that the eyes of the girl were still upon him. He turned, but no sooner had their glances met than she lowered her eyes and continued peeling the potatoes. Suddenly she shifted the position of the chair in which she was sitting, so that her back was turned toward him.

"My son," said Abel God, "just tell the people of your city that I am going to preach in front of your City Hall." He took from a drawer in a cabinet a photograph similar to the one he had given Price, and presented it to Ewing. Then he gave him a number of tracts and leaflets.

"Friend," he said, "read these; come to my meetings."

"What is your mission?" asked Ewing.

"To warn the people to prepare."

"For what?"

"For the end; the day of judgment is upon us. Everything is nothing; nothing will be everything; effort is futile. Be warned; cease your vain endeavors."

"Do you know the day?" asked Ewing.

"Soon," he whispered. "Soon, oh, so soon. The Voice came to me to-day; to-day, even to-day may be the end."

The old man became agitated and paced up and down the small space. A book lying almost upon the edge of a table caught on his robe, and fell to the floor. Ewing stooped and picked it up. It was George Borrow's "Romany Rye." He whistled with astonishment and began to examine the other books on the table. There were Robert Louis Stevenson's "Walking Tours," Charles Kingsley's "Westward Ho," and two small volumes by Thoreau and Hazlitt.

"These books," he said to the old man, "are among my favorites; do you like them?"

"Books are futile," Abel answered. "There is only one Book. Those you see here belong to Musetta. They are keepsakes."

"Musetta?" questioned Ewing.

"Yes, there she is out there, peeling the potatoes," he said, going to the window. "Why, she's not there. Hannah!" he called, growing excited, "where is Musetta?"

"Gone to fetch a pound of coffee," came the answering voice.

Abel God went out on deck and looked anxiously in the direction of the city. For the time he seemed entirely oblivious of his visitor. Ewing followed him out and prepared to leave the boat.

"Not going to stay for dinner with us?" inquired Abel.

"Sorry, but I can't," said Ewing. "Got

a lot of work to do; I'd like to, though."

"Work?" questioned Abel God. "That's the curse; that's helping to bring about the end. Be sure to come to the meetings, son."

As Ewing reached the bend, he met Musetta returning with her purchase. He raised his hat and stepped aside to let her pass. She looked into his eyes for a brief second, and he was aware of a curious thrill. Then she quickened her pace. He looked after her, strangely fascinated. She seemed not at all like her queer companions; she was a slim, graceful creature, and her plain calico dress whipped around her body in the strong breeze that came off the river. Ewing had again started on his way when he heard her call to him. Turning, he saw her running toward him.

"Don't make fun of him," she pleaded.

"I don't understand," said Ewing.

"Yes, you do," she said. "You are going to write something intended to be very amusing. Perhaps it will be to you. Oh, I know," she forestalled, when he seemed about to deny it. "All newspapers have done it. It may be humorous to you, but it is something quite different to us."

"Yes, I should imagine so. I guess it must be irritating to your father."

"It enrages him. But he is not my father. I just call him father. But go ahead and write what you have a mind to. What should I care? And what should you care?"

"But I do care, if it makes any difference to you. We have something in common, you and I."

"What have we in common, I'd like to know?" she demanded.

"Well, we like the same sort of books. I saw some of yours."

"O-oh," she said.

"Tell me," Ewing asked, "are you one of his converts?"

"Why do you want to know? Why should I tell you? Yes, I am! Oh, why did I come back to talk to you? I guess I had to talk to somebody. No, I'm not a convert," she wildly contradicted.

Ewing stood and looked at her in amazement.

"They came through the town where I lived, and I decided to go with them," she continued.

"Why," he prompted.

"In search of freedom," she whispered.

"And have you found it?"

"Yes," she answered. "This is freedom."

"But isn't freedom, after all, only a state of mind?" he asked.

"Yes, yes, a state of mind; that's it," she said slowly. "Not as you mean, perhaps, but a state of mind that is passed on from generation to generation. Those books you saw were my mother's. Gypsy blood was in her veins. I understand it now; I didn't then. Drudgery did it. Her heart cried for freedom. She died when I was twelve. It was not a natural death. After that, people began pointing at me, and shaking their heads. They would not let their children play with me. Have you ever lived in a small town?" she shot at him suddenly. "No? Well, then you can't understand."

"Yes, I think I do," said Ewing softly. "And you have found freedom?"

"I am free," she answered. "I am a child of the world. We go from town to town as we will. We stay as long as we wish. No one molests us, and the old man spreads wide his message. He is happy in thinking he does great good."

"Does he do good?" Ewing asked shamelessly.

"Who can tell?" she responded quickly. "Will you say?"

Ewing smiled. He had no answer.

"Hannah—that's his wife—says he is crazy. They lived on a farm. He was out plowing one terribly hot day. In the middle of the afternoon he staggered into the house and fainted. When he came to he said he had heard the Voice. The Voice said he was to go forth and prepare the people for the end. Hannah

said the doctor told her sunstroke often had some such effect. You can make out the rest of the story. There is the result of it—that houseboat, those two boys brought up in an orphan asylum, old Socrates and his wife, and I."

Ewing shook his head in perplexity. What an amazing recital! "And his name?" he questioned. "Did the Voice give him that?"

"He says so. His name was Abel Goddard," answered Musetta.

"I see. He simply dropped the last four letters," said Ewing. "He probably reasoned, in his disordered fashion, that fate gave him that name so easily adaptable for his new purpose."

One of the half-grown boys Ewing had seen gathering driftwood came around the bend. He grinned foolishly. "Father sent me after you. He was afeared you got lost," he said to Musetta.

"I'll be right along, Brother Luke. Please don't poke fun at him in whatever you write," she again begged Ewing. "He does terrible things when he is crossed or made fun of."

"I'll not attempt anything humorous," promised Ewing.

"Thank you," said Musetta. "And you will be at the meeting this afternoon?"

"Do you want to see me again?"

"I'd like you to be at the meeting," she replied. Then, after she had walked away from him a few paces, she added, "Yes, I do want to see you again."

The City Hall is situated in a wretched part of the town; the main business section has moved a mile further to the south and left that public structure, a specimen of early American rococo architecture as to exterior, and offensively drab and odoriferous as to interior, set in the center of a litter of cheap hotels, tenements and barrel houses. The surroundings approach as nearly as possible semblance to a slum district, as slum districts go in smaller cities.

Adjoining the building is a half-square of green parkway. It is the only breathing spot in that squalid quarter. But there is a high, iron picket fence surrounding it, so the grass is always well-kept and green. The sorry people who live nearby may stand at the fence and admire this spot of verdure without molestation.

Here it was that Abel God was to preach, and here it was that he appeared with his six followers. While his little band waited at the corner, Abel walked the length of the block, and then returned. His strange appearance attracted the attention of the ill-nourished children, playing in the gutters, a few loafers who deserted the street fakir selling "twenty useful household appliances, all in one," and several fatigued-looking women, carrying babies, who had been sitting just outside the iron picket fence surrounding the small park.

Ewing viewed the proceedings from the vantage point of a second-story window in the City Hall. Then he discovered Musetta looking anxiously about the crowd, and he hurried downstairs and became a part of the audience. When she caught sight of him, she gave him an almost imperceptible smile of recognition.

The services opened with a hymn, "The Lord My Pasture Shall Prepare." The old man had a deep, sonorous voice, and Musetta's was one of soulful quality, but the tones of the others were quavering, and their efforts pathetic.

The opening hymn concluded, the little gathering faded into an insignificant background, and Abel God, the chief tragedian in this drama of the streets, stepped forward. He stood, silent, contemplative, brooding, for a moment. Then he raised his right hand high in the air.

"Friends," he said, "I've come to warn you to prepare for the end."

He proceeded no further, nor did the meeting. A slight, vapid-faced young man elbowed his way through the crowd

and confronted him. Ewing recognized the intruder as Jimmie Cooper, a political hanger-on, recently appointed Probation Officer. The authority vested in him was negligible, but he took himself and his duties seriously.

"Say," he demanded, "you got a license?"

"License? No," answered the old man.

"Well, you gotta have a license, or you can't be blocking up the streets," said Cooper.

"Must I have a license to preach?"

"You certainly do. I oughta have you run in now." He motioned to a good-natured looking Irish policeman, who had been standing nearby, idly swinging his club.

The officer, grinning sheepishly, pushed his way through the crowd. It was a distasteful job. He could see no harm being done. "Come on, now," he blustered, "clear out of here."

"Don't let them bluff you, old skeezicks, go on with your preaching," someone called from the crowd. Others took up the cry. It would be fine to see the old man resist these arms of the law; there would be some excitement. But Abel God saw that his audience had lost whatever of the spiritual mood the hymn had engendered, so he turned to Cooper. "I'll go now, but I shall return," he said solemnly as if stating an inevitable fact.

"Well, you better not come back unless you get a license. I'm gonna keep my eye on you."

Abel gathered his little flock about him and started in the direction of the houseboat. Musetta's footsteps lagged, as she brought up the rear. Ewing caught up with her, and they walked along together.

"Is that an example of your freedom?" he asked cruelly.

"That has never happened before," she said. He noticed that she was trembling; her face was very white.

"The forces of civilization will get you if you don't watch out," he bantered.

"Please don't jest about it," she pleaded. "I know this quiet mood of Abel God's. It is most dangerous. He will break out very soon and call down the curse of Heaven on that person. Then he will work himself into a frenzy, and almost anything may happen." She was silent for a few seconds. "Why should he have to have a license?" she demanded. "We've never had to have one."

"Why, it's only a formality," said Ewing. "Just obtaining permission to hold meetings."

"Well, it's wrong," she cried. They had reached the foot of the street; the others had already crossed the railroad tracks on their way to the boat. "Don't come any farther," she urged. "Maybe we will see each other again; maybe not. I'm going to try to persuade him to move on. Perhaps this is good-bye."

"I wonder if it is?" mused Ewing. "It would be wrong, because—"

"Because why," she asked.

"Because I think I should have to follow after you," he said.

"No, no," she cried, but when she looked up into his eyes, he bent down and kissed her. Then she fled from him.

Ewing could not really account for this precipitate act on his part, but all of a sudden it had seemed that this girl, whom he had seen for the first time only a few hours before, was a part of his life, had always been, and always would be. Certain it was that he had never kissed another girl in such fashion, and on such short acquaintance. Nothing had ever so impelled him.

On the houseboat, Abel God, now a fearsome creature, drove his disciples to their knees and commanded that they pray for one hour. He disappeared within the cabin, and then coming out, with but a glance at the supplicants, he quitted the boat.

Ewing saw him a few minutes later striding along the sandy shore. His long hair and beard were tossed by the wind;

his hands were raised to Heaven, and his rich, resonant voice seemed to penetrate the air. Suddenly he fell to his knees and lifted his folded hands; then he bent his head low. After a while he arose. He was calm, strangely so. He strode rapidly toward the town. He passed within a few feet of where Ewing was sitting; his face was serene, placid, benign.

Ewing's first thought was to follow him, but instead he arose and started in the direction of the houseboat. He reached the bend in the river, when Musetta, wild-eyed, came running toward him.

"Have you seen him?" she cried.

"Yes, he's gone toward the town."

"Oh, my God!" she screamed, and flew on. Ewing reached her side, and they raced along until they came to the street; then she stopped, exhausted.

"I can't run any farther," she moaned, "and if we don't find him quickly, it will be too late."

Ewing called to the driver of an old weather-beaten hack, which sometimes carried passengers to the ferry. It was returning now, empty. He helped Musetta into the vehicle and instructed the cabby to drive them to City Hall as swiftly as possible.

"We thought he had only gone to walk along the shore and talk to the waves," said Musetta. "He does that every evening. Then it occurred to me that he might decide to go back there and preach. If that unthinking fool attempts to stop him—"

She did not finish her sentence; there was no need to. The "unthinking fool" evidently had attempted to do that very thing. A pistol shot sounded clear and sharp, and the echo hung dull and ominous in the soft air of the Spring evening. It was followed by another, and another, and another.

"Oh, I knew it," sobbed Musetta. "God help him."

The old nags attached to the hack snorted and pranced about in panic. The driver wheeled them around and prepared to remove himself and his means of livelihood from danger. Musetta opened the door and leaped out. Ewing followed her.

Reckless citizens, whose sense of curiosity temporarily overcame their sense of self-preservation, were running toward the scene of the shooting; other more cautious souls were putting distance between themselves and the danger of stray shots. A policeman, from a nearby beat, attracted by the sounds of battle, the lust for blood gleaming in his eyes, his revolver drawn, dashed past Ewing and Musetta.

Dodging from doorways to telegraph poles they made their way to City Hall Square. Here dozens of bluecoats, revolvers in hands, were running about aimlessly. Some of them, with drawn night-sticks, were charging the morbid, careless crowd, gathering in increasing numbers.

About half-way up the block lay two bodies, grotesquely sprawled on the pavement. White-coated surgeons from the Emergency Hospital in the basement of the City Hall, ran out into the street and bent over the still forms. They called to several of the policemen, who came and lifted the inert bodies. One was a slight figure. Ewing recognized it at once. Jimmie Cooper had demanded that Abel God produce his license; he had received an answer to which there was no reply. The other shapeless mass being carried away was the good-natured Irish policeman.

Ewing brushed his hand across his forehead. It couldn't be! This scene going on before his eyes could not be real.

But it was. How unearthly calm he was; how calm everything was—calm, except for the incessant popping of revolvers. Now there was a deeper note—the riot guns were adding their voices to the chorus. The policemen with these

murderous-looking weapons were standing at windows in the upper floors of the City Hall. They were directing their fire at an object in front of a saloon, and other bluecoat officers, standing behind telegraph poles on the street, were firing in the same direction.

The object was Abel God. His legs had been shattered, and he sat propped up against some empty beer kegs. Two revolvers, empty, lay by his side. He clutched still another in his right hand, and one in his left. He had come well prepared to do battle. Blood was streaming down his face, his wild beard was matted with it. His eyes burned with an uncanny light, gleaming like fire. His score or more of antagonists were wretched marksmen, or it may be that some capricious fate wished to prolong this unequal contest. None of the shots that had found lodging in the body of Abel God reached a vital spot. He was in entire possession of his mental faculties. At intervals he would raise the weapon in his right hand and fire a shot at some venturesome patrolman who dared to expose himself.

When Musetta caught sight of Abel God she screamed. Had not Ewing held to her fast, she would have run to the old man. Ewing wondered why no one of the police was sufficiently ingenious to enter the back door of the saloon and capture him by a surprise attack from the rear. That would be such a simple, obvious thing to do.

Then a tall, stalwart-looking, plain-clothes detective decided that the battle had continued long enough. Crouching low, he gained the middle of the street before Abel God caught sight of him. The old man's strength was waning rapidly; his hand quivered as he fired at this new opponent, who possessed the courage to fight in the open. His shot went wild.

Ewing had always imagined that duelists faced each other, presenting the front of their bodies as targets to their opponents. This one was not being fought in such fashion. The stranger almost turned his back to Abel God. Extending his arm at full length, and taking aim over his shoulder, he fired. The bullet found its mark in Abel's left shoulder, and his arm fell to his side, helpless. The tall man took his time, escaped a return shot, and then coolly fired again. Abel God toppled over. The stranger stood for a moment, waiting, then he sheathed his gun and walked over to the twitching figure on the sidewalk.

Two policemen picked up Abel God and carried him to the Emergency Hospital. Musetta insisted upon going to him, and Ewing accompanied her. The old man was being hurried into the operating room. His eyes were wide open and staring, almost glassy. A faint flicker of recognition seemed to show when he was carried past them.

"Pre-pare—for—the—end," he gasped. His voice was weak, colorless. He died before he was laid on the operating table.

Abel God's body was shipped home for burial near the spot where he had first heard the Voice. His wife, Hannah, the old couple and the two overgrown boys —all faithful followers—were aboard the same train. They were going back to till the land that plain Abel Goddard, as Abel God, had forsaken to go forth and preach the approach of the end.

Musetta accompanied them to the station. They wanted her to return with them, but she shook her head. She was not one of them, yet they were the only friends she had ever known. Dry-eyed, she told them good-bye, but she stood and looked after the train wistfully until it faded from view. When she walked back through the waiting-room she found Ewing standing just within the door. He had followed her to the station. She was not surprised to see him.

"I am as Ruth amid alien corn," she said.

"And your search for freedom?" he questioned.

"In ignorance lies the only freedom," she said. "They, on the train, are free now. And old Abel has found freedom."

"Freedom is a state of mind," he insisted.

"So you said yesterday," she mused, "and I agreed. I wonder?" She turned to leave the station.

"Where are you going now?" asked Ewing.

"Home," she answered.

"Where might that be?"

"The houseboat. It's the only home I can claim. I won't have that long. Hannah sold it this morning before she left. My things are there now, my books, all I have."

"And after that?" he inquired.

"Who knows?" she said.

They reached the spot where they had had their talk the day before. She paused. "It seems ages and ages since we last stood here, and yet it was less than twenty-four hours ago. It all seems like a horrible dream."

"All of it?" he asked softly. "It does not seem so to me. Abel God was crazy, and his mission the result of vague imaginings of a disordered mind. But, Musetta, when I kissed your warm lips yesterday, a message found its way to my heart and opened a new world to me. Musetta, in love there is freedom."

He held out his arms to gather her slight figure to him, but she escaped his embrace, and running to the houseboat she clambered aboard.

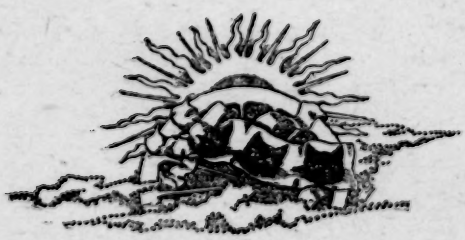
Ewing followed her slowly and found her, wide-eyed, reading the bill of sale tacked on the cabin door. She read aloud:

"BILL OF SALE

"KNOW ALL MEN BY THESE PRESENTS, that Hannah Goddard, party of the first part, for and in consideration of the sum of One Hundred Dollars ($100.00) lawful money of the United States, to her in hand paid at or before the ensealing and delivery of these presents by Everett Ewing, party of the second part—"

"You bought the boat?" she asked.

"Yes," he said, "for you—and for freedom. I told you yesterday I should have to follow after you if you left. Now we shall go together."



UNMASKING CLEO

By FRANK X. FINNEGAN

BRANTWOOD insisted that I should go with him to help in buying the horse. That is how I got into it. I had plenty of my own affairs that required attention and, more than that, as I frankly told him, I know only one point worth while about horses—some are trotters and some are pacers. Aside from this distinction, an animal might have spavin, ringbone, hives, heaves and all the other cavalry discomforts without me being a whit the wiser. But these striking facts did not influence Brantwood in the least.

"I want you along so I shall have a witness to what this fellow says about the horse in case I have to take him into court," he said. "I don't expect any trouble, but he might exaggerate. Of course, I'm not going to ask your opinion about the animal. I was raised on a farm, and I ought to know something about horses."

I was bound to admit that he had me there. The things Brantwood ought to know about make up too extensive a collection for anyone to decide upon its limitations; but I hoped it might not be too late to rescue him from the mendacious horse-trader.

"Anyhow, what on earth are you buying a horse for, in this generation?" I asked. "Everyone I know, who can't afford it, is buying a touring car or a runabout, and those with marked homicidal tendencies are going in for motorcycles. Yet here you come trailing along at the tail-end of the procession, talking about buying a horse. What's the idea?"

He looked at me coldly. A sensitive soul would have suspected rebuke in his manner, but it glanced off me like criticism off a Murphyized nerve.

"I'm not doing this to be eccentric," he said. "You know well enough that I'd have a car if I had the time to spend in court and the money for the fines. This horse was wished on me by Doctor Mœbius. He looked me over a week ago and prescribed a long, slow ocean voyage. I convinced him that he had got track of the wrong Brantwood when he was looking me up in Bradstreet's, and he compromised on a saddler. I'm to ride two hours a day."

"If the horse will permit you to do so," I suggested.

"That's the sort of a horse I intend getting," Brantwood declared, with as much enthusiasm as his Plymouth Rock nature ever exhibits, "and this man Maiwurm tells me he has just what I want. Come along, before someone slips in ahead of me and gets it."

When we met Maiwurm in the reception hall of his livery stable I immediately decided that he was an object of suspicion. He had sage-green whiskers and one of his eyes was of such a roving, rollicking disposition, that he could not fix it on anything definite for more than a second or two at a time. It suggested that he might have been born in one of those lighthouses with the revolving lamps they have down near Sandy Hook. He welcomed "Branty" with too much cordiality, and looked me over coldly. Something seemed to tell him that I belonged to the opposition.

"How's the horse?" Brantwood genially inquired.

"I've had a time keepin' that horse for you," he wheezed through the emerald furze. "There was a fellow seen one o' my men exercisin' that horse out here yesterday, and he come in to me with a hundred and twenty-five dollars, cash money, and offered me it for that horse. But I told him it was as good as sold to you, and I never went back on my word when once I passed it."

This sounded encouraging. If the horse was only half as honorable as Maiwurm admitted himself to be, Brantwood would have a chance.

"That was good of you, I must say," he declared. "When I make up my mind to have a thing, I don't like to see some other fellow get it first. He went away pretty mad, I suppose?"

"Well, he paid me a deposit on the horse in case you wouldn't take it," Maiwurm declared, and I could tell by the roll of his wandering eye that a leaning toward fiction was a dominant trait in his temperament.

"Let's see the horse," I suggested. "I have matters of importance pending in the busy marts of trade."

Mr. Maiwurm ogled me for an uncomfortable second or two, and then shouted an order to the lower regions of his stable. After a little while, during which interim Branty nervously examined prints of sporting gents in red riding coats being tossed over fences by 'unting 'orses that had refused to jump, a dejected hostler crawled into our midst, leading a mild-eyed horse with high, intellectual hips and a permanent air of surprise.

His nigh foreleg had a jaunty curve to the rearward, that was strangely absent from his other members, and as I walked around to diagnose it, he seemed to eye me reproachfully.

"What do you think of him?" Brantwood inquired anxiously.

"I think he would look better to the naked eye if he were reupholstered," I ventured, "and something might be done by an expert to take the spring out of his leg. It looks to me as though this animal might have run away from home to join a circus in his earlier days and had practiced standing on one foot. His weight was too much for the leg."

"He wasn't never in no circus!" Maiwurm retorted indignantly. "This here is a gentleman's saddler!"

"That leg *is* a little off, isn't it?" Brantwood admitted. "Still, you often see a horse whose legs aren't exactly mates. That isn't so bad if they sort of work together, you know."

He stepped around in front of his prospective mount, and the horse sighed heavily into his shirt bosom. Branty drew back in alarm.

"How about his habits? Does he bite or kick?" he demanded.

Mine Host Maiwurm turned on him a wavering glance that was intended to express grieved surprise at this insinuation. If he had raised the horse on the bottle and personally attended to its early training he could not have been more hurt.

"Bite? This horse? I should think not!" he retorted. "I wouldn't sell you no horse that bites! And the only time he kicks is when he doesn't get oats enough," he added, with a playful wink at me, which closed down the lighthouse beam temporarily.

"In that case," I interposed, hooking an arm jauntily over one of the handy hipbones, "I should judge that his life has been one long tango."

Brantwood frowned his disapproval and patted the nag affectionately on its throbbing thorax, having evidently forgiven the wrecking of his shirt front. He was beginning to pine for action.

"Well, trot him up and down. Let's see him move a little," he suggested. "I want to watch his knee action."

"All right," Maiwurm said, almost cheerily. "Take him out, Joe. Give him a good, lively trot. This is a horse that's got lots of action, too," he assured us.

The dejected hostler awoke with a start. It was cruel of his brutal employer to bring him back to the workaday world so suddenly.

"Come on, Cleo," Joe said, tugging at the halter strap. "Giddap! Click, click, click!"

"Wait a minute!" I interrupted. The horse was perfectly willing to do so. Joe showed equal enthusiasm about postponing the exercise and became rooted to the spot.

"Do I understand that this horse's name is Cleo?" I demanded.

Maiwurm's roving eye traveled rapidly in my direction.

"Yes, that's his name," he said. "What of it?"

"There's only one thing for you to do if you buy this horse," I suggested, turning to Brantwood. "You'll have to get him a pink saddle and a baby-blue bridle, or else have him christened over again. In fact, I think the latter plan would be better. You can't expect to call a horse 'Cleo' in front of a self-respecting park policeman and get away with it."

Brantwood looked at the three of us for a moment as though the suggestion were highly disturbing. Then he shrugged his shoulders and motioned to the ennuied hostler to proceed with the demonstration.

"Oh, come on!" he said testily. "Let's see what the horse can do. I'll call him Bill if I want to. Get him outside, Joe."

Thus admonished, Joseph leaned once more against the strap, and it was borne in upon Cleo that his vacation was about to be interrupted. He clicked his ribs together sharply and shook his head at the hostler in violent negation of the suggestion, but Joe continued to heave until the horse grudgingly moved across the stable floor and into the street. There he paused to look around the neighborhood, ignoring the efforts of his guide to lure him down the street.

"What's the matter? Why doesn't he trot along?" Branty demanded.

"I think he is acquainted with the family across the way and he is trying to see whether anyone is home," I suggested.

"He's just lazy a little—feedin' too well and not doin' any work," Maiwurm explained. "I'll start him."

He brought a whip from the office and approached the ennuied saddler with determination flashing from his good eye. At the same moment, Cleo caught the idea and started down the block so impulsively that he left the hostler two lengths behind at the quarter, and was still going strong when Joe overtook him. They made the turn at the end of the street without an upset, and on the trip down the homestretch we had an opportunity to observe the knee action that had been worrying Brantwood.

"Doesn't he raise his hind legs a bit high?" he wanted to know. Maiwurm had been expecting the question and he was ready for it.

"No, no. He got that from being trained to saddle work on country roads where he traveled in soft mud a whole lot," he explained. "I sort o' figure he lifts his feet that way to shake the mud off 'em."

"If you will both pardon the digression," I interposed, "I was once personally acquainted with a horse that put in seven years as assistant to a housemover. His share of the work was to walk around a windlass ten or twelve hours a day and step over a rope every round trip. In the course of time that intelligent animal learned to lift his feet so high you couldn't trip him on a telegraph wire. Has Cleo ever been connected with the house-moving industry?"

The livery man was composing what would doubtless have been a withering retort, when Joseph arrived with the horse, both breathing hard and willing to call it a day right there and knock off work.

"Well, what do you think of him?" Branty asked me when Cleo was posing for us again, his curved front leg show-

ing to splendid advantage against the red brick of the livery wall.

"I don't mind telling you frankly, right here in front of Mr. Maiwurm," I said. "If you are convinced that horseback riding would be of benefit to you, I don't think you could invest twenty-five dollars to better advantage than by buying this horse."

Maiwurm grabbed at his necktie.

"Twenty-five dollars?" he yelled. "Why, this horse is worth a hundred and seventy-five dollars, just as he stands!"

"That may all be," I admitted, "and the way he stands certainly has its unique points. I wouldn't pretend to say what Cleo might be worth from your point of view, Mr. Maiwurm. I was merely telling Mr. Brantwood what I thought he ought to pay for the animal. And as far as the way he stands is concerned, I wouldn't worry about that, because it might be corrected by a simple operation."

Brantwood had been looking at me curiously, as though he were trying to decide whether the excitement had gone to my head.

"There's no use talking nonsense," he interjected. "I came here to buy a saddle horse. Did you ever see anyone get a horse for such a foolish amount of money as twenty-five dollars?"

"Let us not go into the things I have seen along that line," I urged plaintively, "because I have already torn myself away from important matters of big business, and *tempus* is *fugiting* very rapidly. Just in passing, however, I might say that once, on the southwest coast of Arizona, I saw a certain party get a horse for considerably less than the modest sum that has been mentioned. In fact, all it cost him was the fatigue incidental to saddling and mounting the fiery charger in the dark of the moon. He got the horse and the gang got him and he got his—and the matter ended there."

For some reason, this airy persiflage did not appeal to Mr. Maiwurm of the roving eye. From the moment I placed a price upon Cleo his worst suspicions were confirmed, and he turned a faded and odorous shoulder upon me.

"What do you think of his action?" he asked Brantwood, nodding toward the horse, which was going to sleep, with its head on Joe's shoulder.

"Why, it's all right, I guess," he said timorously, "but I was just thinking—doesn't he breathe kind of funny?"

"Breathe funny? I never noticed nothin' funny about his breathin'," the livery man retorted.

"Don't blame the horse," I interposed, laying a hand on my misguided friend's arm; "he's trying to keep from laughing. He overheard Mr. Maiwurm saying he was worth a hundred and seventy-five dollars."

They walked stiffly away from me after that. It was evident that Brantwood resented my reflections upon his horse sense. Maiwurm went up to Cleo, seized her sensitive upper lip and elicited a broad smile.

"Look at that!" he exclaimed, as though we had suspected the horse of being a toothless old wreck.

"Fine set of teeth," he admitted. "Don't you think so?" he added, turning to me.

"They appear to need cleaning, but aside from that I guess Cleo can gnaw his way through life, all right," I said. "What's the idea of the dental display?"

Maiwurm had a withering glance of scorn for my ignorance.

"It shows how old the horse is," he explained, "one tooth for every year."

"Ah! And this is his second set, of course," I suggested.

The livery man did not deign a reply, and Branty said something cutting about choosing the time for my cheap comedy.

"All right; I'll take him," he then said to Maiwurm. "He looks pretty good to me."

He brought up, from an inner pocket, a roll of yellow bills that looked like a pound of butter, and the horse dealer managed to focus his rollicking eye on it as they moved toward his grimy office.

"Here! Wait a minute!" I called to Brantwood. "You're not going to buy this horse without trying him under the saddle, are you?"

"That isn't at all necessary. I know a horse when I see him," he returned stiffly.

I gave him up, with a sigh of resignation. There's no use wasting gray matter on a man who has made up his mind to make an ass of himself, so I waited outside the office while the negotiations were concluded. When they emerged, Maiwurm had a decided list to starboard, and I shrewdly guessed that the roll had changed hands.

"I'll send Joe around with him tomorrow, Mr. Brantwood," he said, "and if you haven't decided where you're goin' to buy your saddle and bridle, I can give you a card to a brother o' mine in that business who can save you a little money."

"Get thee behind me, Maiwurm," I genially observed. "Whatever money your family saves will be credited to the general account."

We went away then, after Branty had cast a lingering look of rapture over Cleo's prominent points of interest as the fatigued hostler led his purchase back to the lower regions.

It was a week later that I met Brantwood again. Horse was uppermost in both our minds, and I delicately inquired after Cleo.

"Cleo has only one bad habit, so far as I have observed," Branty informed me.

"His humorous breathing?" I ventured.

"No, I haven't speeded him up to that as yet," Branty admitted, "but he has a most annoying habit of stopping short whenever he feels like it. He goes along all right for a few squares, then he suddenly turns a corner I hadn't figured on at all and brings up at a dead stop. After I wheedle and coax him a little, he starts again and goes on until he gets ready to stop, and there we are—marooned! I can't understand it."

"My dear Watson, nothing is simpler," I replied. "You've been a bit unfortunate in choosing a place for your morning canter, that's all. You seem to have struck Cleo's old milk route. The habit of years is strong in dumb animals, and when you guided your mount into the familiar avenues where he had served so faithfully, and he saw again the customers' homes, wreathed in the mists of the morning—"

"Oh, forget it!" dear old Branty said, quite peevishly. "That isn't a bit funny. I thought maybe you could suggest something. I'm going to see a veterinary about the nag. Maybe he could cure him."

"Good idea," I admitted; "but if you'll take a tip from an innocent bystander, you'll advertise for bids. I imagine it would be quite a contract."

We parted with a distant air of hauteur on Brantwood's side, but when he called me on the telephone a few days later he had recovered his *camaraderie*. In fact, he was solicitious as to my health and well-being, beyond his usual inquiries.

"Oh, by the way, you remember that when you were going with me to buy that horse I told you I might want you to go to court as a witness for me," he suggested.

"Distinctly," I admitted.

"Well, I guessed right. I do want you," Branty replied.

"My worst fears are realized. You are going to sue Maiwurm for obtaining money under false pretenses," I ventured.

"Worse than that," Brantwood returned. "I have been arrested for horse-

stealing. I am out on bail and will need you at the hearing to-morrow."

"What's the idea?" I gently asked.

"Cleo and I got caught in a rainstorm yesterday," he explained, "and I had to take shelter in the nearest house. Cleo went straight to the barn when I rode in at the wagon-gate, and the fellow who owns the place came out to see what the racket was about. Blessed if he didn't claim the horse! He said Cleo was stolen out of his barn a few weeks ago. He's a milkman, and he knows every harness mark on the nag!"

"Harness marks?" I repeated. "We didn't see any harness marks, did we?"

"No; because that thief, Maiwurm, had glued horsehair all over them," Branty said, "and when the rain washed it off, there they were. Why, that horse was painted up like a chorus girl. You wouldn't know him now!"

"I don't suppose he'd know me, either," I suggested. "But, then, we met only once. I take it that the dairyman was hectic and wrathy."

"The chump wouldn't listen to my explanations at all," Brantwood complained. "He called a big, two-fisted hired man to hold me in the barn while he telephoned for the sheriff and, if the justice of the peace hadn't had a little common sense, I might have been in jail all night! You'll be on hand to-morrow to go to court with me, won't you?"

I said I would and hung up. I hate going to court. But when a fellow has fool friends like Brantwood—

Ah, well. They're what help to make the world go 'round.

THE ROSEMARY OF REMEMBRANCE

By MARGARET DEAN STEVENS

OBERT Dudley, broker, clean-cut, good-looking and forty, sat at his Circassian walnut desk in the best office suite in the new Metropolitan Building in the biggest city on the western coast.

He was looking over his personal afternoon mail, which had come later than usual, and frowning a little at the delay, for he had been ready to leave the office. As he cut open and read the last letter, the frown on his face relaxed its hold, lessened and disappeared. The letter was headed "Central University, Mathematics Department, Thomas J. McCullough, Professor." It said:

"Dear Old Bob:

Are you aware (of course you're not) that this is the year the old crowd promised to meet again at Commencement? As Flo and I are the only ones that married in our own crowd and also the only ones living at the old stand, the reunion is to be at our home.

It's Flo's idea that just the crowd itself is to be present, so we are writing all the others to kindly leave superfluous husbands, wives and babies at home. Naturally, we are putting it more delicately than that, but as you have none of the above, I didn't mince matters.

Of course, you should have married long ago, you old sardine, but we'll forgive you. Come along; don't fail, under any consideration, to be with us June first,

For the sake of auld lang syne.

Tom McCullough."

There was no semblance of a frown now. Instead, a smile that suddenly broke out of its hiding place gave Bob Dudley's face a singularly boyish look.

There was another sheet of paper that had come out of the envelope—a carbon copy. It was signed "Flo McCullough," and said:

"Dear Folks:

Tom is writing the letters to you about our reunion. I am adding a note to each. Forgive the carbon copy idea, but I'm the busiest woman in the U. S. A., and I wanted to tell you all the same thing anyway, excepting Bob and Nell.

You know Bob has never married! Nell has never married! Nuff said! Whatever happened, I don't know,—guess no one does—but let's do our best to get them to fix it up at the reunion. Don't let them suspect, but leave them alone a good deal, etc.; and if it accomplishes its mission, this reunion will be the best ever. All come."

The smile, which had spread, was the forerunner of a chuckle, then a burst that shook Bob Dudley in one of those 110-volt laughs which come occasionally from a quiet, unemotional man.

That Flo McCullough, in her great hurry, had enclosed one of the carbon copies in his own letter, seemed the season's best joke. He sat back in his big swivel chair and let his mind "turn the leaves of fancy" as it recalled to him the members of the old crowd. His mental vision brought them all before him one by one; only half consciously did he reserve Nell Russell for the last. He found himself recalling her in various settings —coming across the windswept, leafy campus, in a scarlet cape and tam cap—

breezing in to dinner at the old Gibson boarding house, late, out of breath, good-natured and sunny. He had cared—Lord, yes, he had cared. That misunderstanding—how trivial and foolish it had been—something to do with a red-haired fellow in the old Philomathian Literary Society.

Into this reminiscent dreams came the office boy. "Mr. Dudley, Mrs. Dudley said to tell you that her and the little boys was waitin' for you."

Ay—there's the joke! Flo McCullough had evidently never heard that Bob Dudley had been married three years and was the proud father of as obstreperous a pair of twins as ever poked pencils and button hooks down the registers.

Robert Dudley stuck the letter in his pocket, locked his desk and took the elevator down. A big car waited his coming. In the tonneau sat a sweet-faced, daintily gowned lady, who clutched two little duplicates to keep them from throwing themselves out bodily at their daddy.

"Hello, there, Goose Grease and Lightning," he greeted them, and to his wife: "Could you stand a good joke?"

"I might risk it," she admitted.

But it was not until they were on the porch of the big brick and stucco house that he produced the letter. He handed her Tom McCullough's with no comment. She read it through until she came to the statement that Bob had no wife nor children. "Well—I must say—I like that!" she announced.

And then—yes, it does seem incredible—he handed her the carbon copy. At the same time he shook again with his 110-laugh. When she had read it through, because she was merry-hearted and liked a good story, she laughed too; but it wasn't 110, more like 40.

"Now," he said decisively, "I'm *going* and I intend to be just what they expect me to be, a single man."

When she gasped at the audacity of it, he went into the details of his plans. He was going to turn the tables on the old crowd and pose as unmarried until the last evening, when he would tell them the joke. If she thought the journey and the plan unwise she gave no utterance to it, merely pulled the handiest twin to her and hid her face in his fat, warm neck.

So, it came about, that on the morning of June first, Bob Dudley, very well groomed and prosperous looking, with something that resembled laughter in his eyes, sat in the smoker of an east bound train as it pulled out of Omaha. An hour out, at a little country station, a fat, shabby man with an old-fashioned telescope valise climbed onto the train.

"Fat Matt, as I live," said Bob Dudley to the huge fellow who came lumbering down the aisle. They wrung each other's hands long and vigorously.

Matt Jones in the old days had been proportioned between fat and bones as the ratio of four to one. Now it was sixteen to one in favor of the fat. He edited a country newspaper and still paid rent, but was the most contented man in the county.

When they had visited for awhile, Bob suggested their going back through the coaches. There was a possibility that they might run across someone else. Through two coaches they passed, recognized by no one nor seeing anyone they knew. In the third, half-way down, sat a lady, chin in hand, looking intently out of the window. She wore a smart tailored suit and from her small hat rose a pair of jaunty wings. Something in the tilt of her head and the gold-brown of her hair caught the attention of the two men.

"Matt," Bob half turned to him, "who's that girl?"

"Nell Russell," he whispered back and got so red in the face that Bob would have laughed aloud if his own heart had not been pounding strangely.

"How do you do, Nell?" He spoke in as matter-of-fact a tone as though he had been seeing her all these years.

She glanced up, a faint pink traveling

over her face, but kept her poise perfectly as she put out her hand. Seats were quickly arranged so that they might all talk together. It was noticeable that most of Nell Russell's remarks were addressed to Fat Matt and it was toward him that she usually looked.

They lunched together in the diner and when the girl inadvertently said, "Bob, here's your favorite cantaloupe," she looked genuinely distressed at the slip.

It was late afternoon when the train pulled into Watertown. The station was a mass of moving students, class colors, arriving parents and old grads.

"Brings it all back, doesn't it, Nell?" Bob asked as he took her grips.

Flo and Tom were watching for them —Flo, plump and matronly, Tom as tall and cadaverous looking as though he ate his mathematics.

"How am I ever going to get you all into my car?" he asked as he led the way to where a little car of very modest price and very immodest notoriety waited. "If any of you crack a joke about it, I'll tip you all out when I turn the corner at Dry Run."

"It's an elegant little car, Tom," said Bob, at which they all laughed immoderately.

Matt and Tom sat in the front seat where Matt oozed over the sides. The others filled the back seat.

"Anybody else here?" they asked.

"Everybody that can come," Flo informed them. "There are nine of us now. Molly Fletcher is here and Jim Caldwell and Ethel Dotson and Jen Grier."

The little car bounced merrily over familiar roads lined with unfamiliar residences, past new dormitories and boarding houses, and slackened in front of the campus that smiled gently at them like a kind old mother whose sweet face welcomed them home.

There were artistic new entrances to the driveways, a half dozen new buildings, and a strange campanile pointed its finger obelisk-like to the blue sky; but the older buildings, the trees, the paths under them, the very grass, seemed waiting to bestow upon the wanderers the rosemary of remembrance.

Bob Dudley involuntarily looked across Flo to Nell Russell. She turned big blue eyes to him that were moist with memory. "Oh," she breathed, "it's rather like a grave yard, after all, where our youth lies dead." Of which statement Flo made a mental note to tell Tom the minute she had him alone.

They stopped in front of a low, roomy bungalow whose long porch held two hammocks and numberless rockers. Three people were sitting there, but all rose and came down the steps. Little Jen Grier came first, tinier than ever, with the same quick-motioned ways that had won for her the name of Jenny Wren. She had been saucy, too, like her namesake, quick-witted and sharp-tongued, and in the joking way with which Fate handles us, she had married a minister.

Ethel Dotson, heavy and slow-moving, came forward a little shyly. She was the wife of the governor of a southern state, but in her heart she despised the life and the executive mansion and longed to be back in her own home.

Jim Caldwell had broadened, too, from the slim college boy to a plump, well-fed dentist. As Bob Dudley shook Jim Caldwell's hand he said, "Good Heavings! Is everybody fat?"

"All except me," said a voice above them; and Molly Fletcher stood in the doorway, literally filling it from side to side. She was a sight, but her good-natured face beamed happiness behind her big spectacles. The years of hard work on a Kansas farm had left her with the philosophy that "Although for a dozen years it was just nothing but windstorms and new babies and grasshoppers and whooping-cough and crops drying up and measles and seventeen-year locusts and pink-eye, it was all for our good, I guess."

The hour that followed was not an

unqualified success. After the travelers had dressed and returned to the porch, things seemed to lag. The reunion seemed not to have lived quite up to its expectations. The old crowd was nothing but a group of nearly-to-middle-age people who politely and with forced jocularity recalled anecdotes of some specially jolly young folks they had once known. After all, you can't entice Youth from her hiding place when your mind is on a growing boy's examinations or an unfinished job of printing or the setting hens that were to come off to-day.

At ten minutes of six Flo announced that they had better start as they were to go several blocks to their dinner. It was an odd looking little procession that they made. Flo led the way with plump, dapper Jim Caldwell and quiet, tranquil Ethel Dotson. Fat Matt and little Jen Grier were behind them, looking like De Wolf Hopper and his tiniest ballet dancer. Tom McCullough, gaunt and as long as a geometrical equation, was painfully trying to suit his step to huge Molly Fletcher's waddling gait.

Bob Dudley and Nell Russell, slightly conscious that the others had purposely left them behind, were bringing up in the rear. Although their conversation consisted largely in generalizations on the improved condition of College Hill, although he was apparently saying, "They have converted Prexie's old house into an isolation hospital," and she was answering, "What a good idea"—what mentally passed between them was, "Do you remember that seat under the oak, Nell?" and, "Oh, *do* I Bob?"

As the little procession followed Flo's lead, crossing one corner of the campus to a row of old houses that stood modestly facing a short side street, it gradually percolated through someone's head that she was taking them to Gibson's. Immediately they were all exclaiming the same thing: "Surely, Ma Gibson doesn't keep boarders yet!"

"Goodness sakes, no!" Flo informed them. "She is over eighty and lives out in the country with her son. A young couple lives here. They use the old dining room for a laundry, but when I told them about the reunion and how we'd like to eat here for old time's sake they took out the tubs and boiler and we fitted it up as nearly like it used to be as we could."

They turned into the familiar old basement dining room.

"Same old ivy. Same old screen door. Some old bumble-bee hanging around," Jim Caldwell said as he went in.

The kitchen door swung open and Flo's biggest surprise stood before them. Lizzie! Tall, angular Lizzie—her pale hair drawn as tightly back and pinned with as countless a number of wire hairpins, her apron as big and stiffly starched, her eyes shining as kindly over huge cheek bones, as ever! They were all shaking hands with her and listening to her explanation: "Yes, I been married fourteen year come Christmas—livin' up to Tanley—jever see such foolishness—me leavin' my old man and chickens to come down and cook for you—but Mis' McCullough she would have it—"

Youth, who had eluded them up to this moment, seemed to slip in shyly from the kitchen with Lizzie. For the first time they began to feel young. In hilarity that was no longer forced they sat down in their own old places. Only for a moment they were sobered by the thought of the two who were absent. Lou Reeves was not there, for she was teaching in the Philippines. Bert Morrison was not there, for he was dead.

As the meal progressed, all restraint vanished. Gone were the years and the newly formed ties—forgotten were the hardships and joys, the hours of failure and the hours of triumph. They were the old crowd. The band was playing La Paloma on the campus. Lizzie was in the kitchen. Youth was in their midst.

And Youth abided. So much in the spirit of the occasion were they that by

unanimous vote they decided to cut the class play and continue their old time visit on the McCullough's ample porch.

The laughter that rang out from that porch was so infectious that more than one passing student grinned in sympathy. Long-neglected episodes were brought to light; the evening was replete with "Do you remember?"

"Remember, Tom in Latin class, reading 'Hic, hic, sunt senuta,' and Bob whispering, 'Sit down, old man, you're drunk'?"

"Remember your note, Matt, that you pinned on the laundry you sent to the washerwoman:

'If all the shirts I sent to thee
Should be delivered home to me—
Ah, well! The dresser would not hold
So many shirts as there would be
If all my shirts came home to me'?"

"That reminds me of Molly's touching ode to our china-painting teacher when that craze first struck:

'The hours I've spent with thee, dear heart,
Are as a string of daubs to me,
I count them over every one apart,
My Crockery—my Crockery.'"

Far into the evening they sat in reminiscent mood. No one enjoyed it more keenly than Nell Russell. Temperamental, emotional, she seemed to throw her whole soul into living over her youth. Gay and sparkling, she was vaguely conscious that Bob Dudley's eyes were upon her with something of the same expression in them that had been there for her in the old days.

So apparent was this to the others, also, that no one was surprised when the two lingered after the crowd had dispersed. Romance-loving Flo, in her own room, whispered rapturously to her practical husband, "It's working, Tom—oh, joy!"

That "it" was "working" became more evident as snatches of low-toned conversation from the porch were wafted to her.

"I did care—with every fibre of feeling—" came from Bob, and Nell's softer tones, "But how was I to know?" And a little later:

"Good-night, Bob."

"Good-night, dear."

"Tom," Flo whispered, "he kissed her!"

"Hear it?" he growled, sleepily.

"No—but I felt it," she retorted.

When Bob Dudley went to the room which he was to share with Jim Caldwell in the house next door, he realized that Nell Russell seemed as much a part of his life as she had been in the days long gone by. Had she really ever been out of it? At any rate, the college setting, the old crowd, the moonlight night, all had woven a magic spell, the charm of which he was enjoying more than his fancy had dreamed.

"Jim, a fellow can make an awful ass of himself," he said enigmatically to his yawning bedfellow.

As the second day wore on with its alumni reunion, parade, ball game and picnic supper on the river bluff, Bob Dudley found himself dreading more and more to break the news of his marriage to the crowd. The joke that had appeared so hilariously funny in California, now seemed harder to carry through than he had anticipated. Instinctively he knew that, for the rest of his stay, his status would be lowered in the eyes of the people whose faith he wished to keep.

And Nell?

He chose the evening of that second day to enlighten them.

With apparently an unintentional slip of the tongue, he said, "Just before I left home I was arguing that same thing with my wife—"

It was like a hand grenade in their midst.

"Your what?" "What's that?" "What are you saying?" came the shrapnel return.

Everyone looked involuntarily at Nell Russell and as quickly looked away. She had glanced up at Bob, startled; then a flush, painful in its intensity, slipped over

her face as she dropped her eyes away from them all.

Bob Dudley explained with more elaborate finish than quite necessary, how it had seemed a joke when reading Tom's letter to let them think him still single—that he had been married three years before in California—he hoped they would all visit him sometime—

But no joke ever lay in such a flat, punctured condition as that one. Disappointment showed plainly in more than one face, but above all, sympathy—sympathy for poor, proud Nell who wanted none.

"The whole thing's spoiled," wailed Flo McCullough to her liege lord. "And that poor Nell—she has cared for him so! How could he—?"

"Well, cheer up—it's love's labor lost," advised Tom, who was secretly as disappointed as she.

Another day of Commencement activities came, in which everyone in the crowd took a feverish interest as though to keep from thinking of the romance that was no longer romantic. And when in the evening Bob and Nell deliberately broke away for a long stroll out toward the country, something akin to disgust swept through the mind of the most loyal friend.

There was a noticeable frigidity in the air when the two came back to the porch, although Molly Fletcher, with characteristic good spirits was as talkative as ever.

Nell looked very sweet and thoughtful as she sat down in the shadow of the vines. Bob perched on the rail near by. Suddenly, with an impulsive movement, he reached down and took her hand. Everyone felt uncomfortable and embarrassed. Fat Matt wheezed to Tom McCullough, "The mutts!"

"People," said Bob Dudley, and his voice had a queer foreign note in it, "I have something to say—and I want to say it to all of you here first. It's going to be hard—you're going to censure me—I take all the blame—you are in no way to think hard of Nell." He raised his head suddenly with almost an arrogant gesture. "Sometimes," he went on in a moment, "a man makes a mistake and the only thing for him to do is to acknowledge that mistake and—rectify it if he can."

Everyone was staring at him as though hypnotized, all but Nell. She had her head in the hand that Bob was not holding. "Long ago—I made a mistake—" His voice was tense. "Nell and I were engaged. I—something came up—an unbelievably small thing it seems now in the light of the years that are ours. Three years ago I married—" He began picking nervously at the crimson ramblers. "When Tom's letter came and I realized that none of you had heard of my marriage, the temptation came to me to keep up the pretense for awhile—to see Nell as I used to—here—at the old school—with all of you. I let my wife read Tom's letter—she even knows what I planned to do." He paused. Everyone felt the import of the moment. All eyes were fixed upon him. There was no sound but Fat Matt's asthmatic breathing.

"Well," he went on, "I found Nell unchanged—and caring for me—just as I know I have cared for her all these years. Nothing else matters now." He suddenly stood up, big and dark against the rose vines. "Again I beg of you not to be harsh in your judgment when I tell you that Nell and I are leaving in the morning and we go—together."

It was like the third big act in a drama. They sat there stunned—these kind, simple, common folk, to whom sex problems and the divorce court had come no closer than newspaper reading. The tragedy of it, the overwhelming bigness of the step Bob and Nell were taking, left them in a half-anaesthetized condition.

Just as little Jen Grier, who had been working her hands together, was moistening her dry lips to speak, Bob turned to Nell and touched gently her bowed head.

"Don't you think we had better go in the morning, Mamma?"

"Yes, I think so, Father," came in muffled tones.

"Mamma! Father! What do you mean?" They were shrill, nerve-tense questions, like the staccato bark of dogs.

"I mean," Bob said deliberately, "that just because you didn't know that Nell and I were married three years ago is no reason—"

They were no longer a stunned audience. They were a stung audience—and between the two lies many a ripe egg and tomato can. None of these commodities being commonly kept on a university professor's front porch, the audience substituted numerous hammock and porch pillows and a choice collection of epithets.

"You see," Bob Dudley was defending Mrs. Dudley with one arm, "first I got Tom's letter; then Nell's, addressed to Miss Nell Russell, at Seattle where she last taught, was forwarded to her. Then we knew for sure that none of you had heard we were married. Speaks well for our correspondence, doesn't it? And when Flo generously put one of her carbon copies in my letter so that we knew you were all expecting a regular five-reel feature from us, we decided to put on a good performance so not to disappoint you. I had hard work persuading Nell to leave the twins—"

"Twins?" It was Fat Matt, the machinery of whose mind had suddenly begun to work. "You mean you two folks are married and own a pair of twins? Well, you old double-barrelled mutts!"

TRIPE AND CATS

By WILLIAM MERRIAM ROUSE

ONDNESS for tripe may be a racial trait, an acquired characteristic or a personal idiosyncracy. It matters not. It is still true that an inordinate love for properly browned morsels of this succulent dish was the reason why Dennis Olsen was beating his wife on a bright May morning. She had burned his breakfast tripe.

Dennis was beating his wife calmly, as a man should. He held her by the back of the neck and administered alternate cuffs and remarks about the tripe with a dispassionate impartiality which bespoke rather his Scandinavian blood than his mercurial Irish strain. The din of West Forty-eighth Street, which penetrated even to the fifth floor rear tenement, obscured some of the remarks, but it mitigated none of the cuffs.

"Me tripe was burnt and me tripe was tough!" said Olsen, more in sorrow than in anger, as he flung his wife into a chair. "There is but one way to cook tripe, no matter what the Dutch and the Dagoes may tell ye. Soak it over night, bile it till it's tender, and then fry it in hot fat to the color of a mild seegar!"

"Yes, Denny," sniffed Mrs. Olsen. "I done all that and I only burnt one piece!"

"A piece of tripe is a piece of tripe," announced Dennis, pointing a warning finger at his wife. "What with me out of work going on six weeks there's no tripe to be wasted, Nora! I want tripe fer breakfast and tripe fer supper, Nora, and if there's one piece spiled I hate to think of the beating I'll give ye!"

"Yes, Denny!"

That repeated "Yes" irritated Olsen, as it will when a man's wife agrees with him too meekly. His florid brow wrinkled in a frown and he advanced with one capable hand raised. Mrs. Olsen winced, but that blow never fell, for from behind her husband came a long-drawn, plaintive cry.

"Me-ow wr-r-r!"

Olsen jumped and his face turned the color of an uncooked piece of tripe as he whirled around. On the window sill behind him was a large, bristling, yellow-eyed Angora cat.

"The saints preserve us!" whispered Dennis, as he backed toward the cook stove. "There's that banshee ag'in!"

Mrs. Olsen opened her eyes. Her husband, edging farther and farther away from the window, came in contact with the hot stove about at the mid-section of his being. He leaped forward with a yell of earnest woe, and the cat disappeared over the window ledge and down the fire escape. Perspiration broke out profusely on Dennis's forehead.

"That's twice since daylight and three times during the night that critter's been trying to come in here," he said, unsteadily. "Never a cat like that have I seen on Forty-eight Street, Nora! 'Tis the work of the Evil One himself!"

"Yes, Denny."

This time acquiescence failed to rouse the ire of Mr. Olsen. He had a pain and a plethora of thought to occupy his attention. As he rubbed the pain and scratched his head he meditated aloud.

"I've seen tiger cats, and three-colored cats, and bob-tailed cats, but never till this day have I seen a cat with blue hair

as long as a goat's and eyes the color of an eggnog. The critter is no cat!"

"Sure it's a cat, Denny," said Mrs. Olsen. "Would ye believe in an elephant if you'd never seen one?"

"I would, fer I'm a man of intelligence," replied Dennis as he rinsed out the beer bucket. "It's not fer the likes of you to be contradicting yer husband, Nora, or mebbe he'll give ye another beating."

Mr. Olsen took ten cents from the flat family pocketbook and went out on his usual after-breakfast errand. He was good for two "pints" before dinner and three between dinner and supper. The number thereafter would vary inversely to the square of his grouch. Mrs. Olsen sighed. If Dennis didn't stop waiting for another job to come to him she knew that the Charity Organization Society would have a new case to investigate.

That cat was an added trouble, for although its direct effect was on Mr. Olsen, his wife got the recoil. Three times in the night the yellow-eyed, blue-haired animal had penetrated to the second and sleeping-room of their apartment, and three times Dennis had arisen in his wrath and hurled shoes until the supply gave out. Before breakfast, during breakfast, and after, the cat had reappeared via the fire-escape, and now Dennis Olsen was a shaken man. Mrs. Olsen felt the jar.

As for herself, the cat was a surprise, but it had no effect on her nerves. Nora Olsen would have accepted a pink cat with green stripes in the same spirit; ten years of married life had furnished her with so many shocks, spiritual and physical. A cat was a cat to her, and black eyes would have been as common by any other name. She put the day's supply of tripe on to parboil as the clump of her husband's footsteps sounded on the stairs.

The first glass of beer disappeared at a gulp. The second went more slowly, and Mr. Olsen rested his elbow on the kitchen table and regarded his wife with a very nearly tolerant look as he sipped the third glass. His puckered features smoothed themselves out. The breeze from the open window at his back was soothing.

"I've been thinking, Nora," he said, as he drained the pail into his glass, "that I'd have tripe fer dinner, too. Three times a day is not too often to eat a dish like tripe."

"'Tis well ye spoke, Denny," answered Mrs. Olsen. "I was planning to have some fried potaties."

"Fried potaties is all right fer the Irish," remarked her lord, forgetting one whole half of his ancestry, "but the strong an' warlike race of Swedes needs meat."

Three things had happened to Nora Olsen. She had been deprived of her beloved potatoes, for besides bread and tea, they could afford but one dish; she had been forced to three meals of tripe in a single day, when two was the limit of her endurance, and she had been constrained to endure an insult to the Irish. It was for three reasons, then, that she said not a word when she saw the big, blue cat hop on to the window ledge and reach a tentative foot toward the kitchen table on which Olsen lolled, all unconscious of his doom.

Dennis leaned on the table with his back to the window, and the cat put forward first one foot and then another until it stood, unrebuked, with its whiskers almost brushing his ear.

"A potatie-eating race like the Irish is to be pitied, Nora, but—"

"Me-awr-r-r!"

Dennis Olsen never went through space any faster, not even when he was blown up in the subway, than he did that instant. He stopped because of the sink. It was in the way. As he gripped its greasy sides and stared back at the table, the blue cat straightened its tail up in the air, opened its mouth and again said:

"Me-awr-r-r!"

"'Tis the soul of some poor devil I've had ructions with, Nora," whispered Olsen. "Heaven send they's some way to appease him!"

Mrs. Olsen raised her arm and a skillet hurtled through the air. It missed, by the fraction of an inch, and passed across Dennis's line of vision between him and the cat. That animal took the hint and in a flash there was no cat.

"Did ye see that, Nora?" demanded Olsen, hoarsely, gripping his wife by the arm. "The frying pan went clean through the critter and he went off in a cloud of smoke!"

The glimmering of an idea came to Nora. She realized why it had seemed to her husband that the skillet had gone through the cat, but his imagination had conjured up the smoke and here, at last, was something between heaven and earth that scared him. It ought to be useful.

"There's no telling what's the meaning of this Denny," she said solemnly. "They's things mortals don't understand at all."

Olsen went to the family pocketbook and, with a trembling hand, extracted another dime.

"Drink won't be after helping ye to keep that banshee off, Dennis Olsen!" Nora caught her breath the moment the words were spoken, for it was the first time she had ever dared advice.

"Nora, I'm a sick man and I need it!" His tone was almost pleading. "Let a sick man have his whim, Nora!"

Although Dennis went out with the beer pail and the dime, his wife thrilled with a new emotion. She had dared a protest and it had gone unrebuked. The day before, temerity like that would have cost her a pair of black eyes. She had a distinct feeling of friendliness for the strange cat.

It was near dinner time and the odor of frying tripe filled the two rooms when Olsen came back. The potency of something more than beer lent a gleam to his eye and a rolling motion to his walk. He set the beer pail down on the table with his old, accustomed emphasis.

"Me dinner," he commanded, "and be quick about it!"

Out of the tail of her eye, Nora saw that the effect of the blue cat had somewhat worn off, but, on the other hand, Dennis was in a frame of mind extremely susceptible to things of the imagination. He turned out a glass of beer.

"Me dinner, woman!" with a thump that slopped the beer.

For the first time in ten years, Mrs. Olsen failed to say "Yes, Denny" to a command, and for the first time she delayed to obey. She was waiting and hoping, with an eye on the window. Suddenly her face brightened. She forked three pieces of tripe, burned to a crisp, onto a plate and slammed it down before her husband.

"There's yer dinner, Denny Olsen!" Nora's hands were on her hips and her chin was thrust forward. Her husband looked at her in astonishment, and then his face grew dark with anger.

"Burnt tripe!" he roared. "And you a-tellin' me to eat it! So ye think ye can talk back to me, do ye?"

Olsen half rose from his chair. Then his wife stretched out one arm and silently pointed toward the window. The glaring yellow eyes and the head of the blue cat looked over the sill. Dennis sank back with a gurgle.

"Take it away, Nora!" he begged, weakly waving one arm. "Take it away and I'll say no more about the tripe, and I'll not beat ye this time!"

Mrs. Olsen swung her body forward as though to take a step, with her eyes on the cat. That animal dropped back on its haunches and sat on the fire-escape, out of Dennis's sight. He pulled his eyes away from the window sill and reached for his beer.

"Shut the winder, Nora, that's a good girl," he said, after a deep draught. "If the critter can walk through glass, then I'll know me time's come, sure enough!"

Nora closed the window. Then she put bread and tea and three more pieces of tripe, unburnt, before her husband. As she opened the door into the hall, Olsen partially recovered himself.

"Where now?" he demanded. Mrs. Olsen swung around and fixed him with a hard stare.

"None of your business!" she said, with a significant glance toward the window. Dennis subsided, muttering, and poured another tumbler of beer.

Nora Olsen tripped downstairs with a light step. She even hummed a lilting tune as she threw open the door of the rooms under hers, now vacant, and went in. Out on the fire-escape she looked up and saw a long, shaggy blue tail hanging down through the strips of iron.

"Come, kitty! Nice kitty!" she called softly.

The blue cat looked, switched its tail, and daintily minced down the steps. It purred. Mrs. Olsen gathered it in her arms and stroked its ragged head until the purr rose to a song of peace and contentment.

"You darlin'!" she murmured. "'Tis the making of Denny Olsen you'll be!"

On the stairs just above her own landing, Mrs. Olsen sat and waited with the cat in her arms. Time for the first pail of beer on the afternoon lap came and she heard Dennis come out and go downstairs. Then, with the song of the blue cat ever ranging higher, she ran into her rooms.

The nature of the animal abruptly changed. From a sweet-singing, fireside pet he became a raging and almost unmanageable collection of claws and teeth. It was only at the cost of half a dozen scratches that Mrs. Olsen muffled him with her apron and threw him, apron encumbered, into the coal closet. She sat down, breathing hard.

"The divil is in the critter, after all!" she exclaimed. "Small wonder Denny thinks 'tis a banshee!"

The rebellion of Nora was not to be quelled by a cat. She placed a pile of plates in the sink, convenient to hand, and laid the rolling pin beside them. Then she drew a chair within reach of the coal closet doorknob and waited.

Dennis Olsen swaggered into the room with the exaggerated air of a free-born American citizen. Mrs. Olsen knew at once that the burnt tripe and the banshee were at death grips for the ascendency in his mind.

"Get me a tumbler!" he ordered, as he took the cover from the beer pail. "No more of yer nonsense!"

Mrs. Olsen reached over into the sink and picked up the rolling pin. She glanced significantly at the window. Her husband, filled with his usual mid-afternoon quantity of courage, sneered.

"No cat, green, blue or yellow, ever scared Denny Olsen!" he shouted, pounding the table just a little too hard to carry conviction. "Get me a tumbler!"

For answer, Nora tore open the door of the coal closet. A glaring-eyed monster, blue-spotted with black, whirled out in a cloud of dust and leaped to the center of the table. Its tail was the size of a man's leg; it arched its back and spat.

Dennis was no longer a free-born American citizen. He was a humble suppliant to the powers that rule the world of the supernatural. Down on his knees in the farthest corner of the room he breathed what prayers he could remember, impartially to the saints and to the devil.

There was a sharp and peremptory knock at the door. Nora, assured by a glance that her husband was occupied, sprang to open it. In the hall stood a woman the like of whose mink motoring coat Nora had never seen. A galaxy of rings gleamed from one ungloved hand. Before the stranger could speak the blue cat, scenting a way to freedom, leaped from the table to Nora's shoulder and thence into the bosom of the mink coat.

"Oh, Piffle!" shrieked the strange

woman, in an ecstasy of joy as she gathered the cat in her arms.

Nora Olsen was not Irish in vain. She hastily pulled the door shut behind her.

"Speak lower, if ye please, mum," she said. "Me husband's sick."

"Where did you find Piffle?" asked the stranger. "I lost him out of the car yesterday on my way to the pier, and I've been inquiring from house to house all through this neighborhood!"

"He come to us, mum. It seemed almost like he was sent!"

"Doesn't it?" beamed the cat's owner. "He's Piffle III, you know—the one that took all the prizes last year."

"Yes, mum."

Suddenly Piffle made a lunge and landed at the door. He put his nose against the crack.

"Me-awr-r-r!"

"He's hungry!" cried the stranger. She sniffed the overladen air. "You've been cooking tripe! That's practically the only food that Piffle will touch!"

"Just like me husband, mum," replied Nora, edging toward the door.

Piffle's mistress gathered him up in her arms. She thrust a ten-dollar bill into Mrs. Olsen's hand.

"That's for taking such good care of my little darling," she said. "Good-bye!"

Nora looked at the ten-dollar bill as the steps of the stranger grew fainter on the stairs. She stuffed it into her dress and went into the kitchen.

Dennis was just reaching for the beer pail. He quailed before his wife's glance. She took the pail out of his unresisting hand and poured ten cents' worth of good beer into the sink.

"Not another drop till ye get a job, Denny Olsen," she announced firmly. "Now go out an' look fer work!"

BETWEEN THE LINES

By AVERY GAUL

HE cook of "The Hotel" was hanging up the griddles on the wall. He was a new man in the place, a long, lean youth, with a face and a turn of phrase that set one wondering.

He banged the lids down on the stove with rare dexterity, washed his hands at the sink, gave the roller towel a final twist, and, mopping his flushed face with his slim hand, sank down on a bench outside the kitchen door.

Before him, the rutted road littered with tin cans, the stretch of railroad tracks, the iron ore barges abandoned at the river mouth, all steamed up foully in the hushed, hot noon of a Michigan Sunday. Only the raucous shouts of the half-sober bargemen blattered out through the squalid harbor town.

The wandering cook settled himself on the bench beneath the awning and prepared to wring some enjoyment out of his short half day of rest. Cracking open a gaily covered August magazine, he turned the pages indifferently until he came upon this story:

THE STORY

"Ride?"

"Jump right in!"

The long, gray car, pushed and jammed by the theater crowd behind it, nosed up close to the curb. Stephen Cross, bending over to tuck in the robe, looked levelly into the eyes of a pretty girl who stood there on the sidewalk. His spontaneous answer to her unexpected question had hardly been uttered ere she bounded up into the empty seat beside him.

"You are so good," she thanked him prettily, "you don't know!"

"I had not expected this," Cross assured her. "I had thought I was on an errand!"

The girl made no reply, suffering him to scan her without flinching.

Traffic advanced.

"Where to?" asked Stephen Cross.

The black-suited little blonde looked up at him artlessly.

"I want you to take me please to a moving-picture show. The new one, on Sixth Avenue, near Stillman."

The man laughed easily. "Any hurry?"

"Yes."

He turned and stared at her, uncertain, for there was only a block to go. Was she joking? A bit miffed, Cross doubled the corner on one wheel and banged up to a sudden stop.

"Well, then," he began, turning to assist her, but she was gone! The crowd pouring into the mirrowed foyer of the Nickelodeon had swallowed her up completely.

"Say, who was that?"

Cross turned to a man who chanced to stand at his elbow, for he remembered with that after-sense which follows like an echo on a moment of suspense, that he had seen this man raise his hat as the girl had disappeared.

"Her? She's our pianist." The glib little man in the derby hat stared at him in surprise. Then:

"Why, say!" he exclaimed, "ain't you Steve Cross, whose father's lawn I used to mow?"

"Dave Hayes!"

The two young men shook hands like two long-lost fraternity brothers.

"I'm manager here," explained Dave, with an embracing gesture. "Got her yesterday."

"Well, she's got me!" ejaculated Cross. "Just worked me for a ride down here, did she?"

Dave consulted his watch, then grinned. "She probably didn't get her supper dishes washed up in time! She told me she was doing light housekeeping. She ain't a regular pianist, you know," all this with one eye on his gluttonous doorway.

"What is she, then?"

The ex-lawn-mower showed his bristles.

"Say, I've known that girl a long time! She's a stenog, that's what she is! I knew her all the time she was going to night school; after her father got his hand cut off in the mangle, and the mother ran off with one of the boys on the wagon, and her a little shaver working in the packing rooms! And then going to night school! Learning to play the piano off an old Russian on Dougherty's organ behind the café. She's a stenog, that's what she is! Do you get it?—and she's a blamed good one, too," he growled.

"I'll take your word for it," soothed Cross. "I'll take your word for it. You know," lighting a cigarette and speaking with shut teeth, "I wasn't trying to kidnap the girl! If she wants a job—at stenography—send her to my office tomorrow morning." And handing his old friend a business card, he drove away.

Dave Hayes whistled. Then he fell back to his usual pastime of betting with himself which of the crowd would turn in at his gilded doors.

"That makes forty," he muttered, "that I'm owing to the house!"

Nevertheless, the next morning, much to the individual surprise of the three persons concerned, Nell Willoughby called at the real estate office of S. Cross & Company and was engaged to do their correspondence at ten dollars per week.

"For she's just the kind of girl that we've been looking for," S. Cross informed the office staff. And the office staff smiled covertly. He had not, himself, been looking.

Nell proved, as had been vouched for her, a good stenographer. Her beauty, that is, the glowing radiance of her that made one always think of her as beautiful, was her only drawback. Cross, after the first haphazard week, felt it incumbent upon himself to chaperon his new stenographer every time and all the time that a strange man happened to enter the office. Nor did he ever argue it out with himself as to whether he was protecting his, or her own, interests.

Nell Willoughby's attitude was quite too scrupulous to be interesting. It was as if she had set out to convince him that the whole episode of their first meeting had never occurred. Now, she would not ride with him on any pretext. And when he pleaded she simply said, "Oh, that time I was in a hurry."

"But why pick me out?" he would inquire, half-eagerly, half-mockingly.

And then she would flash him just half a tiny smile, and say:

"Oh, you? You happened to be near!"

Night after night, Cross would leave her standing on the street-crossing, waiting for her car, perhaps in the rain, perhaps in the snow, while he tried to slip by to his automobile without ostentation. The situation made him feel so uncomfortable that he took to leaving his roadster around the block, where he did not have to crank it, as it were, in her face. He loathed display.

Once he followed Nell home and saw the dingy boarding-house that she called home; watched her drag her tired self up the steps and hold the door open as long as she dared, to let the fresh air battle with the stew-laden atmosphere within.

He felt rather than saw her climbing up to where at last the gas was lighted in an uncurtained room. He saw her take

her skirt off and pin it across the sash. And suddenly, the pitiful bravado of the situation overpowered him. He grew angry, then sad.

It was after this that Nell got her little raise.

Toward spring, Cross took to calling her "Prim Posey." When she would not let him put fresh flowers on her desk he left a standing order at the florist's and told her it was part of her work to arrange them every day.

"But you may give me an old one," he begged one afternoon, when he found her working at them, her hands buried in clusters of the blossoms. "Oh, my, yes! I like faded ones far the best! There, in my buttonhole. Why, Prim Posey, what a stingy thing you are!"

"I'm not! It is economy!"

"Well, don't economize on me!"

"If you don't appreciate it, sir," she smiled, "perhaps there's some one, then, that will."

"Oh, don't! The firm would go to the wall without you! It would! You must consider that!"

Then he asked seriously, "Nell—Miss Willoughby—are you ever sorry that you didn't stay with the Nickelodeon?"

"Sorry!" The girl jumped to her feet and made as if to touch his arm, but hesitated. "Mr. Cross, you will never know—"

And he never did know.

The telephone clanged; he picked up the receiver. When he turned back to her he was very grave.

"That's strange, Miss Willoughby," he said. "That was your old moving-picture manager, David Hayes! I mean it was the hospital speaking for him."

"He's not—"

"No, got hurt in an accident. He wants to see me right away. Wonder what for."

Cross began to clear up his desk and his little stenographer hurriedly sorted out the evening mail. Nell never stopped working.

"What shall I do," she asked, "if you are not here to-morrow morning?"

"Oh, I shall be! Unless I hang around the exchange awhile. I can't tell. I put every cent I could on cotton this morning, and begged and borrowed to cover it this afternoon. And it dropped off eight at the close!" He shrugged. "Well, good-night."

"I said good-night," he repeated, watching her for some sign.

"Oh, yes! Good-night, Mr. Cross!"

And the man laughed boyishly as he hurried down the corridor.

Then Nell ran to the window and watched for his automobile to worm its way out of the canyon of the street below. He looked up from the corner and she waved. (They had done this for only a week.)

To-morrow: and S. Cross did not return. All day the faithful little stenographer inquired for the health of, first, David Hayes, and then of U. S. Cotton. Dave seemed to be doing nicely, but cotton kept going down. When night came, Nell and the young man in the office shut the door and went down in the elevator in silence.

The second morning: Cross was still away.

Cotton, however, had opened with a jump. Was the head of the firm, the head, body, and feet, in fact, so engrossed that he had forgotten there was such a thing as real estate?

The young man in the office went out to reconnoitre and came back after a time completely discouraged. The Boss was not on the street at all.

The third and fourth days: Still no Stephen Cross. His business had passed the urgent point and threatened to collapse. Nell chewed her finger tips all the morning, and when afternoon came put on her hat and started out.

Long ago she had telephoned to every conceivable haunt of his. Each day she had raked through all the death and accident notices that the newspapers could

worry up. It had come to a point where she jumped every time she heard an ambulance gong, and she turned white when she saw a hearse. So she decided that she would go and talk things over with Dave Hayes; it was he who had seen Cross last.

The hospital was suffocating. Nell wondered miserably if Stephen Cross was not stretched out white and still in some such place. She glanced in all the doorways apprehensively. And when a nurse had ushered her into Dave's bare little chamber, a sudden heartsick feeling made her pull off her daffodils that she wore and lay them on his table.

So the sick man thought that the tears in her eyes were all for him, and he looked up in surprise and gratitude, and murmured:

"Why, why, Nellie!"

The girl felt uneasy. Her words fell flatly into the merest commonplace. How strange he looked with his bandaged leg humping up the tidy bed clothes and his bearded face sunk back on the flat pillow. She realized suddenly that she could not afflict him further with her own trouble. He had enough to bear.

The nurse, who prided herself on her tact, decided to leave them alone. Nell rose in alarm.

"Oh, I am going, too!" she cried. "I was just going to start!"

But Dave demurred, the nurse slipped out, and Nell found herself standing, half-embarrassed, wondering what to do.

"Why hasn't Cross been up here?" Dave asked, as if he had waited for just this chance.

Nell gave a little start. "Wasn't he up here Monday?"

"Oh, yes, but I gave him rather an important errand to do and I thought he would be back here by now.' '

"Well, you see," the little stenographer fibbed instinctively and unconsciously, "he's been so busy that he has hardly been in the office even! Shall I tell him anything?"

"Tell him," Dave spoke with that forced facetiousness that sick people assume, "just tell him not to get busy with that eight hundred dollars I gave him to put in the bank! That belongs to the firm."

"I will," Nell smiled unconcernedly, and left.

But concern had gripped her, whether she would or no. And concern grew into ugly dread that dogged her footsteps home.

Weeks dragged by. This way and that, by delaying one customer and evading another, by answering one letter and filing another, they kept the office open.

Then one warm day Dave Hayes came limping in, and when the young man asked Nell if she would see him, he noticed that she drew herself together rather sharply, and answered:

"Yes, I'm ready."

So the young man withdrew.

"You know," Dave Hayes began in a don't-dare-to-contradict-me tone of voice, "what I said I'd do the last time we were talking over the telephone?"

"You said that you were going to the bank as soon as you got out, and see if the money was there."

A silence.

"Was it?"

"No."

The girl did not wince.

"You knew it then!" flared Dave.

"I—"

"I said I'd send a detective for him if I found the money had not been deposited, and I will!"

"You—"

"Look here, how it was!" He leaned toward her excitedly. "I was run down by one of those fool motor cycles. I had that money, eight hundred and forty-two dollars, on me—I was taking it to the bank from the noon shows. They put it in the hospital safe, but, like a fool, I thought that wasn't a good enough place for it and sent for him to put it in the bank for me. And," his

voice fell, "honest, Nell," he finished, "I can't make it out!"

"I can."

"He was rich and he was the only honest man I ever knew! Look what he did for you."

"Don't, Dave," the girl's voice was very low, "I know all that. Know more than you ever can, possibly. I was down and out when he took me up. I didn't care much what I did for a living, next. Why, when I came up here to see what he wanted me for," she hesitated, then continued in a different voice, "I want to tell you something, Dave."

"I know what you want to tell me," he interrupted vehemently, "but I don't want to hear it. This thing is out of my hands now! It was the firm's money. It ain't as if I could do what I wanted to about it, and could afford to lose. I would maybe—for your sake. But they're ready to send if I say the word and—"

"You won't say it!"

"Why?"

"Because he's going to pay!"

Dave bounded to his feet. "How?"

"How do I know? Because he wrote me a letter and told me so! I'm the only person in all God's earth who knows where he is, and I won't tell!"

Dave dropped down limply on the arm of his chair.

"All right," he said. "I'm glad. Of course I'm glad. Sit down. Tell me about it."

"He was gambling on margins. You gave him your money to deposit for you, and the banks were closed. The next morning he had to cover his losses and he borrowed your cash. The market fell all day, and he couldn't raise another cent. He'd cashed in all his own securities the day before that. It was all over with him. He could either jump off the bridge or get out of town. He got!"

Nell's voice had a thin, hot sound. "And he doesn't dare come back! He can't ever come back. But," she finished, defiantly, bound to be proud of something, "he's working now, somewhere, and he's going to try to send me fifty dollars every month, and I'm to give it to you. That's more than you'd get if you brought him back here and put him in jail, isn't it?"

Dave stared at her. "So that's how it is, is it?"

He drew his breath in and took a sharp turn or two around the room. Then he gave a big sigh and held out his hand.

"All right, Nell! I'm glad it turned out that way."

He gripped her hand very hard, then dropped it quickly. His smile was rather wan.

"All right, Nell! You send me the check and we won't speak of it again. Good-bye."

"Oh, Dave!" The girl's voice broke and she could not see him as he closed the door, but all the way down the corridor she heard his cane, tap, tapping.

A year went by.

Then one spring day, one day when the sky called, and the flowers were so plentiful that they sold for fifty cents a dozen in the florist's windows, one day like this, one Saturday afternoon, Nell Willoughby put on her hat and left the office early. She was going to pay Dave Hayes the last installment of the debt.

She wore a tidy little suit, and a daffodil in her coat, and she tripped so blithely up the Avenue that everyone who passed her felt a little glow. Dave Hayes was so enthusiastic that when she started to leave he followed her all the way to the doorway.

"So the young man has kept up the business, has he? And everybody's satisfied, and you are still drawing your pay at the same old stand and buying posies!"

Dave looked at her wistfully.

"And now that it's all settled and nobody's worse or the wiser, I suppose he will be coming back and there'll be wedding bells!"

"Oh, I never said that!" Nell colored furiously.

"No, I suppose not, exactly—oh, it's a gay, fine spring for some folks!"

"Yes, it is," admitted the girl, with a strange little intonation, "as you say."

And she turned rather abruptly and left him standing there, wondering. He had intended to take her home.

Nell walked twelve blocks—the habit was strong upon her to save her fares—then stopped at a shabby door.

"I could not," she murmured, as she held the front door open to let in a rush of air, "I could not have let him see where I am living. He might have guessed."

She climbed the stairs and sat down on the sofa-bed, then took off the coat with the daffodil, and looked around.

"Good-bye," Nell said. "Good-bye, little leaking gas jet, and little jam pots on the shelf! When I first knew you I hated you so that I didn't care what I did to get rid of you, did I? But we've grown quite fond of each other, haven't we, since we've been trying to give a chance to the man who gave me mine?"

She stood up to shake down her heavy hair and, as she did so, she leaned far over, whispering to the girl in the mirror frame:

"I *wish* that he had written, as you said, and that I did know where he is, as you pretended, and that I were sure that he is all right, and that he might know that now he can come back and—and marry me— But I'm glad, I'm glad that I could keep the man whom I love out of prison!"

The wandering hotel cook gazed spellbound at the story.

Suddenly he rattled the pages back and looked at the name of the author, and it was the real name of the girl, who, in the story, had called herself Nell Willoughby.

With a great clattering, he brought his chair and his feet and himself down squarely upon the pavement.

"Come here!" he yelled. "Everybody! Help me to get started!"

And as they all came running up, he dictated to them furiously:

"Tommy, my bag. Watch is in the bottom of the soap dish. Maggie, you go look up a time-table. Hurry, somebody, ask old Fritzy for my pay!"

The landlord, with a gesture of authority, swayed toward him from the doorway.

"Say, Steve," he drawled, "who do you think you are around here, anyway?"

Then, and they still talk about it at the Harbour, that young man suddenly picked up an open August magazine and shook it in Fritzy's face, crying:

"That's who I am! Right there! Right in that story! Read it! I'm through—I'm going home!"

MEOWS FROM THE MOVIES

By ALICE GLENISTER

By this time Pearl White, Fox star, is hard at work on her third picture for that company. Almost immediately upon landing from her European vacation she started work. We never saw any one with so much dynamic energy; she fairly eats her work.

Marion Davies, that bright and glorious Cosmopolitan star, owns three machines and is an expert operator of all: a brand new, blue gasoline-wagon, a typewriter and a bicycle. On the latter she spends many fine mornings riding around Central Park. Her new picture is "Buried Treasure," by F. Britten Austin.

Harold Lloyd seems to be one of the new film people who can genuinely like his leading lady. With Harold, professional jealousy is nil. Mildred Davis is his pretty film sweetheart and more often than not they are together discussing their joint work as it unfolds.

Bert Lytell, Metro star, is going to return to his first love, the stage, in the very near future. He is now in New York rehearsing for his fall début, or re-début. If Bert proves to be as pleasing on the stage as on the screen, his success is assured.

And so Bessie Love is going abroad. Well, well, how times do change. Time was when it was only the very rich girls who went abroad to finish their education. Now, every film star thinks her education is not complete without a trip abroad. Some educations could be finished in America.

Winston Churchill's novel, "The Inside of the Cup," has been chosen for Marion Davies. Albert Capellani has been selected to direct the picture. Could a better combination be found to insure a perfect product?

Four stories have been bought for Thomas Meighan: "The Frontier of the Stars" by Albert Payson Terhune, "The Conquest of Canaan" by Booth Tarkington, "Cappy Ricks" by Peter B. Kyne, and "Easy Street" by Blair Hall. The line-up is good, we say.

Charlie Chaplin's five-reel comedy, "The Kid," features Jack Coogan, a prodigy discovered by the comedian. Is he being trained to succeed the famous Charlie?

Shirley Mason, newly made Fox star, is living up to expectations. In "Her Elephant Man" her work was exceptionally good for the greater part of the picture, but in "Love's Harvest" she continues to improve and almost approaches perfection.

We don't care particularly for the story, but Shirley makes all there is of her part; also there is a very clever dog, and motion-picture audiences seem to have a love for dogs. We say, the more we see of some male stars the better we like dogs in pictures.

Charles Ray's "Peaceful Valley" will be released about October or November. "Forty-five Minutes from Broadway" will have its presentation first.

"These clothes make you look much shorter," said Director Norman Dawn to his pretty star, Edith Roberts, as she adjusted the grass skirts she wears in her new picture of the South Sea Islands, "Marama." "Yes," agreed Edith, "but I am afraid they will make the men in the picture look longer."

After having been reformed by nearly every good looking and sweet young ingénue in the business, Bill Hart will retire after his present contract has expired. While we will miss Bill terribly, perhaps it is just as well to introduce young blood into picture romances. Buck Jones please note.

Another of our film actresses has gone abroad—Winnifred Westover. Miss Westover is not taking the trip for the purpose of having her return announced in bold type; she will make pictures for the Sweden Film Company. Winnifred is of a Swedish type and ought to be particularly fitted for their pictures.

Ethel Clayton is another one who has left our shores for England to make pictures in the Famous-Players' Studios. What's the matter with America, or the girls, or what?

Madlaine Traverse, known as "the empress of stormy emotion," has just completed her fourteenth picture as a Fox star. We don't know very much about this brand of empress, but we do know that we like the work of Madlaine Traverse.

Mary Miles Minter says she likes all-day suckers, chocolate cigars and licorice shoestrings. What's more, Mary says she doesn't care who knows it. When we entered her dressing-room one day, her first greeting was to hand us a paper bag and say, "Have one?"

Florence Deshon has completed work with Maurice Tourneur's production of "Caleb West, Master Diver," and has been engaged by Fox for the leading rôle with William Russell in a film version of Ridgewell Cullum's novel, "Twins of Suffering Creek."

Teddy, the trick dog belonging to Antonio Moreno, is earning a star's salary. He has been playing in Tony's Vitagraph serial and was loaned recently to Lew Cody for a bit in "The Mischief Man," at $50 a day. Tony says he is going to retire and let the dog support him.

One of the most pleasing leading men of to-day is Robert Gordon. He is very natural and a real fellow. He has about finished "The Vice of Fools," a special Vitagraph production. It would not surprise us to learn that Robert had his own producing company.

Betty Blythe, that scintillating luminary of the screen, whose clothes have always been a wonder to us (we wonder how she manages to keep them on), claims she is tired of being the daughter of rich parents and would like to play the part of a poor woiking goil or some slum person so that she could wear rags.

Betty wears few enough clothes now. What would she be like with only rags to cover her? You tell us.

Mabel Normand was never better than in her recent Goldwyn picture, "Rosa Alvara, Entrante." Her supporting cast, with Tully Marshall, Eugenie Bresserer and Hugh Thompson, make the picture one of the good ones to be seen this season.

$2,500.00
IN CASH PRIZES
for the Best Plot-and-Action
NOVELETTES

The Prizes Are:

1st Prize	- - - - - - -	$1,000
2nd "	- - - - - - -	750
3rd "	- - - - - - -	500
4th "	- - - - - - -	250

THE prize-winning stories will be stories of plot, of action, of interesting complication —stories that are meaty and fast-moving, yet both real and reasonable. Spend the sweat of your brow on deeds, not on acute character analysis; on big situations, on suspense and appeal, not on tedious description and fine writing.

The check-pulling stories will be the stories of BIG IDEAS, LOGICALLY and POWERFULLY developed.

Write about present-day life, and avoid the morbid, gruesome, supernatural and unpleasantly tragic. No dialect stories will be considered.

Conditions

1. Each manuscript must bear at the top of the first page the writer's real name and address, in full; also the number of words in the story, which may range from 10,000 to 25,000. Do not exceed the latter number.

2. Each manuscript must be typewritten on standard size paper (8½ x 11 inches); must be sent flat or folded, but ***not rolled,*** postage or express charges fully prepaid, and accompanied by stamped addressed envelope for return. Letters concerning stories submitted must be enclosed with manuscripts—not sent under separate cover. Manuscripts will be received and returned only at the writer's risk.

3. Every manuscript will be judged purely on story-value, on its interest in plot and action;

and the name or reputation of a writer will carry no weight whatsoever.

4. All envelopes containing manuscripts should be plainly marked "Prize Contest" and addressed "The Black Cat Magazine Inc., 229 West 28th St., New York, N. Y." Their receipt will be acknowledged. Any competitor may send as many stories as he pleases, but in each case he must comply with all the above conditions.

5. Failure of any manuscript to fulfill all the above requirements will automatically eliminate it.

6. The competition will close August 31, 1920, and within sixty days of that date the awards will be announced in THE BLACK CAT and paid in cash. All stories submitted in the competition that are found to be acceptable for publication in THE BLACK CAT will be paid for at regular rates. Publication of these stories will begin as soon as possible, and all stories thus accepted will be published with the statement "Entered in THE BLACK CAT Novelette Con-

test." Prizes will be in addition to the regular rates. The publishers make this provision for payment at regular rates and early publication of prize entries because they recognize the fact that many writers do not wish to tie up marketable material for the long period required to make the awards. Decisions will be made as promptly as possible and all unacceptable manuscripts returned. All manuscripts received in envelopes postmarked later than August 31, 1920, will be considered for publication, but will not be received as entries in the Prize Contest.

All conditions and requirements being here fully set forth, the editors cannot undertake to enter into correspondence relative thereto.

The Black Cat

THE BLACK CAT MAGAZINE INC., *Publishers*
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